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David Hill

The records of the trial or trials of Jesus in all four Gospels reveal significant discrepancies and opinions differ widely about their historicity. Mark, who is fairly closely followed by Matthew, reports three meetings: one, of the Sanhedrin at night (Mk.14:55-65), a second in the morning (15:1), and a hearing before Pilate (15:2-15). At the night meeting the proceedings lead up to a charge of blasphemy and a general condemnation. After the further morning session Jesus is handed over to Pilate and is finally delivered up for crucifixion on the charge of claiming to be the King of the Jews. Luke (22:66-71) mentions only a morning meeting of the Sanhedrin at which Jesus is condemned for suggesting that he is the Son of God. He subsequently appears before both Pilate and Herod Antipas and is handed over for crucifixion. The account in the Fourth Gospel is apparently based on independent tradition. It has Jesus examined by Annas and Caiaphas at night, then taken to the praetorium for a hearing before Pilate (John 18:28-19:16) and the dialogue it reports as taking place in both sessions differs greatly from the other reports. Whereas the Synoptics place the emphasis on the proceedings of the Jewish court, the focus in John's Gospel is clearly on Jesus' appearance before Pilate. (It should be noted that between the Johannine report and the Mark-Matthean tradition there is one significant agreement: a nocturnal 'judicial' session before Jews and a day-time investigation before Pilate).

From the divergences in the various Gospel records we may reasonably infer that the early Church lacked precise information on what actually happened after Jesus' arrest. Moreover, it is clear enough that theological considerations have affected the way the story is told in the Gospels. The tendency to exculpate Pilate and the Romans and to place the responsibility on the Jews (stemming from the primitive Church's struggles with the synagogue) is already present in the Synoptics (Mk. 15:10,13) but reaches its climax in the Fourth Gospel where the Jews as a whole are blamed for their deliberate reaction to and rejection of Jesus.

The stories being what they are, therefore, the task of historical reconstruction is particularly complicated and precarious. The question of the reliability of the Marcan



narrative hinges largely on the disputed problem of the scope of the Sanhedrin's jurisdiction over capital cases in Jesus' time. Evidence comes from a considerably later period, from the Mishnah tractate Sanhedrin, and it is debatable whether such prescriptions as it lays down for the Sanhedrin's legal procedures in capital charges actually applied in Jesus' day or not. If they did, then Mark's account is in conflict with the stated requirements that the Jewish court had to be held in the daytime, on two consecutive days, and with the hearing of the witnesses in private.

It has been suggested by Solomon Zeitlin that normal procedures were not followed in this case because the Pharisees were not at all involved and the Sanhedrin that heard Jesus' case was not really a religious Sanhedrin but a political one, dominated by the Sadducees, with Caiaphas playing "the role of a 'Quisling' who proved ready to sell out Judea to the Romans for personal gain." (Cf. S. Zeitlin, Who Crucified Jesus?, 1942, p.165f.) But there is nothing in the texts to support the contention of such purely political motivations. On the other hand, many commentators have held that the hearing before the Sanhedrin was more in the nature of a preliminary, informal investigation, preparatory to the trial proper before Pilate. But against that (and this is, in my view, important) it is clear that Mark regards the Sanhedrin trial as official although he makes no allusion to it nor to the charges it laid when he records Jesus' appearance before Pilate.

Just how ambivalent the evidence is from the Gospels, M. Sanhedrin and such other slender pieces as remain, may be gauged from the quite contrary historical views that arise therefrom. For instance, in his book On the Trial of Jesus (Berlin, 1961) the Jewish scholar, Paul Winter, argues that since the Sanhedrin in Jesus' time was competent to try capital cases, and so had no need to have re-recourse to Pilate for the execution of Jesus, and since in fact Jesus was executed in the Roman fashion, as laid down by Roman law, the whole story of the hearing before the Jewish high court is unhistorical. On the other hand, a classical scholar like A.N. Sherwin-White (in Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament Oxford, 1963) maintains that in Jesus' day the Sanhedrin

had no jurisdiction in capital cases (cf. John 18:31), that the Sanhedrin session and the condemnation for blasphemy are historical, and that the Jewish leaders thereafter turned to Pilate and put pressure on him, either on the political charge of sedition or on the religious charge, both being capable of presentation to Pilate as potentially damaging to Roman interests.

A large number of commentators therefore claim that the most that can be affirmed with confidence is that the Roman prefect condemned Jesus to death (on a nebulously understood legal/political issue) and that the Jewish religious leaders were also somehow involved, so well attested in the Gospel tradition is the rising tide of their hostility to Jesus and his message and in Paul the Jewish persecution of Jesus' followers shortly after his death (Gal.1:18; 2:1). There are also some who suggest that the view adumbrated in John (18:3, 12) has much to be said for it, namely that both the Romans and the Jews were implicated and in collusion from early on in the proceedings that culminated in Jesus' death. On the basis of what may be learned about Pilate's character from sources extraneous to the Gospels it would seem that this stubborn and rather inflexible man would have been unlikely, without previous negotiation, to be so quickly suborned by the Jewish leaders into sentencing Jesus to death as the Synoptics (especially Mark and Matthew) seem to suggest.

In this essay our interest is focussed on the proceedings before the Sanhedrin. One must, however, bear in mind Lietzmann's hypothesis that the Jewish trial (Mark 14: 63-65) is an early Christian composition and therefore of little or no historical value. The object of Lietzmann's attack was primarily the Marcan account of the Jewish trial which he thought had been intercalated between Peter's denial. This precise issue can be argued out in one of two ways: (i) that Mark 14 verses 53 and 54 introduce two parallel accounts, the trial and the denial, and both go back to the oldest traditions of the disciples: or(ii) that there is sufficient evidence for Mark's penchant for intercalating material to make it likely that the Jewish trial has been inserted (as a secondary composition) into the denial scene. My own view on this is that, even if intercalation appears to be a Marcan redactional feature, that does not necessarily mean that the "intercalated" trial



before the Sanhedrin must be unhistorical. There is a Jewish trial after the denial scene in Luke, and John too has an examination of Jesus by Annas and Caiaphas ahead of the hearing before Pilate. Clarification of Mark's redactional tendencies will not of itself get rid of a Jewish trial.

But Lietzmann - and in this he is followed by many scholars - attacks the historicity of a Jewish trial by claiming the Sanhedrin did possess the power to try and condemn capital cases or certain capital cases but was not involved in Jesus' trial because the manner of his death-crucifixion - was a Roman punishment and was therefore meted out by the Roman prefect. Although this view is followed by scholars of the stature of Dibelius, Bultmann, Bornkamm and Paul Winter, and also by R.H. Lightfoot and T.A. Burkill in more recent times, there are three significant problems attached to it.

(i) If it be true that the Jewish court had no involvement with Jesus' trial, whence comes the strong tradition that it had? Has it just been made up in order to accentuate features - like Jesus' silence and the Son of Man saying (Mark.14:62) - which contribute to a Servant Son of Man christology? There have been and are supporters of that view(e.g.) N. Perrin, Eta Linemann and W.H. Kelber but I have to admit that I find hard to accept the theory of a constructed Jewish trial to fit the teaching or christology of the early Church.

(ii) Can we be so certain that crucifixion has to be a Roman punishment? Ernst Bammel (depending on earlier work by Ethelbert Stauffer) has demonstrated that the originally non-Jewish punishment of crucifixion had been used in Palestine since the second century B.C., even by Jewish courts: because it was a particularly gruesome punishment it was used especially in political cases, like those branded by the Romans as ἀνδρεία brigandage or rebellion (cf. The Trial of Jesus, 1970, pp.164-5)

(iii) The third major problem about Lietzmann's view is that it presupposes the Sanhedrin's unrestricted right to invoke and carry out the death penalty. This question of Jewish capital powers has been treated with wearying frequency and disappointing inconclusiveness. The review of the matter in the second edition of Schürer's magisterial work (vol.11, 1979, pp.221-23) admits that neither case can be effectively proved, but goes on to say that



"it can always be claimed that none of the arguments in favour of the Sanhedrin's competence in capital cases exclude of themselves the eventual need for Roman confirmation of a death sentence", and gives as examples the trial and stoning of Stephen and the death of James. David Catchpole has reviewed the evidence and claims that the balance of probability (which is the most we shall get) favours the view that Jews could at that time pass capital sentences, but were prevented from carrying them out. "The evidence of legal proceedings during the procuratorial period suggests that the system stated by John (in 18:31) and assumed by the Synoptics is correct. The Jews could try but they could not execute." (The Trial of Jesus, p.63) And the cases they would try would be "religious" crimes, or prima facie religious crimes.

A reasonably good case can, in our view, be made out for the historicity of a Jewish trial. But the trial scene in Mark conflicts, as has been said above, with Jewish procedures as evidenced in the tractate Sanhedrin in the Mishnah: it does so in five respects: the night session, a trial on a feast day, the omission of the statutory second session; the discrepancy between the blasphemy and M.San. VII.5; and finally, the meeting in the house of the high priest. Now it can be debated whether all these infringements of rabbinic law in fact apply to Mark - Catchpole argues that only three do and that none applies to Luke's traditon, if the law actually did exist in the time of Jesus - and on that matter we cannot reach certainty.

One noteworthy method of dealing with the irregularities in the Marcan trial was offered by J. Blinzler who argued that the prevailing law at the time of Jesus was Sadducean, whereas the Mishnah attests the situation when Pharisaic legal procedures became dominant. This hypothesis is very difficult to prove,, since Sadducean priests and Pharisaic scribes alike sat in the Sanhedrin (during the Roman-Herodian period, the only one we have any precise knowledge about.) Two other pieces of evidence would tend to cast doubt on Blinzler's thesis. (i) The link between high priests and pharisees is frequently referred to in the New Testament and could well reflect the actual state of affairs. (ii) According to Josephus (and he may have been biassed) the Pharisees exercised dominant influence: "when the (the Sadducees) assume (judicial) office", he says, (Ant. 18.1.4.(17), "they submit, though unwillingly and perforce, to the formulas of the

Pharisees, since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them"; although when writing in War 2.17.3 (40) about events at the time of the beginning of the A.D.66 war he speaks of the "men of power coming together with the chief priests and with those best known of the Pharisees". So when Blinzler concludes that "everything which has been found irregular about the trial of Jesus (and he means Mark's account, in the main) in the light of the Mishnah is in full harmony with current law which was Sadducean and which did not know or acknowledge the Pharisaic-humanitarian peculiarities of the Mishnah which had no basis in the Old Testament", we can say at the very least that this conclusion is too broad, for we know very little about the details of Sadducean legal procedures; in any case, Sadducean law must have been strongly against legal proceedings on the sabbath or feast days, yet the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin takes place, according to Mark and Matthew, on the eve of Passover! Blinzler's thesis about a deep division in the attitude to criminal law between Pharisees and Sadducees seems rather improbable. Would not what strength and power the Sanhedrin had, under the Roman prefect, be secured only through unity and co-operation? But as far as legal procedures are concerned what would that unity be based on? I would suggest that it would be achieved on the basis of the Mosaic law, and in particular, Deuteronomy 13-17, from which I quote.

Deut.13:1 -"If a prophet arises among you or a dreamer of dreams and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods', which you have not known, 'and let us serve them', you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer of dreams....  
v.5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God,...to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from the midst of you."

The passage continues to threaten death by stoning to any relative or friend who entices the Israelite to follow other gods ('And all Israel shall hear and fear, and never again do any such wickedness among you', v.11), and if any city allows itself to be enticed towards apostasy, all who are in it and its cattle shall be put to death by the sword. Chapter 17 returns to the subject:if



any man or woman does evil in the sight of the Lord in transgressing the covenant and has gone and served other gods and worshipped them, then that person is to be put to death by stoning on the evidence of two or three witnesses, and the evil thus purged from the midst (vs.1-7). And a little later, with reference to criminal and judicial decisions made, we read, 'The man who acts presumptuously, by not obeying the priest...or the judge (the arbiter of justice), that man shall die; so you shall purge the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and not act presumptuously again' (vs.12-13). It seems to me that these legal regulations were so fundamental that neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees would have lost sight of them. The false prophet or the beguiler of the people was a threat that could not possibly be dealt with leniently. In a religious case involving that kind of offence, there would, in all probability, have been unanimity between the Pharisaic and Sadducean wings of the Sanhedrin.

Now it is impossible to prove that the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus as a beguiler or seducer of the people in accordance with the legislation set out in Deut. 13 and 17, but I wish to draw attention to some points which might make that hypothesis plausible.

(i) There are a number of New Testament texts which seem to imply that Jesus was viewed and treated as a seducer of the people. (a) Matt.27:63, where the Pharisees speak of Jesus as "that imposter", ( ἡ κείνους ὁ πλάνους ) and, in trying to prevent the stealing of his body lest the people be made to think he has risen from the dead, they say "and the last fraud ( ἡ ἐσχάτη πλάνη ) be worse than the first". Although this text may be legendary, it does indicate a specific judicial impression about Jesus and may reveal the assessment of Jesus by the 'synagogue' as opposed to that of Matthew's own community. πλάνους, πλάνη (vb. ΠΛΑΝΩ) are words which suggest misleading, leading astray and deception. (b) This terminology occurs in John 7: 12 and 47 with reference to Jesus' leading the people astray and of people being led astray (in the eyes of the Pharisees) by him. Again at the end of John 11 the fear of the chief priests and Pharisees is couched in these words: "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, every one will believe on him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation"...:the charge is that of beguiling the people; and the section ends with the

chief priests and Pharisees giving orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him, presumably, if possible, before the feast of Passover. The entire episode - and there may be more than a grain of historical truth in this Sanhedrin counsel, as Dodd and Brown suggest - has strong overtones of the need to "purge the people" of an evil doer or seducer of the people, and of the legal (Deuteronomic) requirement to present witnesses. (c) At Luke 23:5 the chief priests and the multitudes are made to claim that Jesus is "stirring up" (ἀναδιδέει) the people. Blinzler argues that this charge by the hierarchy of incitement has no recognisable connection with Jesus' trial, but is it not virtually the technical designation for the activity of the "seducer" who, as v.2 puts it, is "perverting" (διαστρέφοντα) the nation and saving that he is **ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ**. (d) In the Dialogue with Trypho (of which tradition part may go back to the second century A.D.) it is said that the Jews saw Jesus as a magician (μαγός) and a seducer of the people (ἀποπλανός), 69.7 and cf. also 108.1, **πλανός** - a beguiler or deceiver.

Now even after we have put to work all our historical-critical tools on these verses, it would be hard to rid the tradition altogether of the view that Jesus was a regarded by Jews as a deceiver or seducer of the people. (ii) The second point of interest is the possible relationship between the legislation in Mishnah tractate Sanhedrin as regards the seducer or beguiler (of Deuteronomy) and the trial of Jesus. Of course, the legislation in the tractate dates after A.D.70, but in so far as it contains a tradition that goes back to Deuteronomy it may reflect the state of affairs operative in the time of Jesus. Now San.11.3 has the interesting prescription concerning the rebellious elder (i.e. an elder who rebels against the legal decision of a court): "He is not condemned to death either by the court in his own city or by the court in Jabneh (A.D.70-118) but is brought up to the great court in Jerusalem. He is kept in guard until one of the three great feasts (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles) and shall be put to death on one of the three feasts, for it is written, And all the people shall hear and fear, and do no more presumptuously (Deut.17.13) Thus R. Akiba." These words, drawn



from Deut.13: 11 and 17: 13 imply that the punishment (strangling) of the rebellious one is public and exemplary and is to take place at a feast in order to have its effect on as many as possible. San.74a lists among those whose punishment is stoning "he who beguiles. ....and he that leads astray", as well as "the blasphemer who pronounces the Name and the sorcerer." It is quite significant that, according to Tos. San.11.7, these categories of criminal have the death-sentence carried out at one of the great feasts (even on the rest-day or preparation-day for a great feast), with the same invocation from Deuteronomy stated: And all the people shall hear and fear, and act no more presumptuously. Furthermore, another tradition from Tos.San.10.11 allows the trial of these criminals (viz.the beguiler, the seducer, etc.) to be completed in the one day: "the judge can begin in the morning and conclude at night: they can begin and end the trial on the same day." I readily admit that I am working with evidence that is difficult to assess and date, and it may be thought that I am forging too many links in a chain. But let us see what is firm and will bear weight. First of all there is the Deuteronomic legislation about the death-penalty for anyone who seduces or beguiles the individual and/or the community away from loyalty to God, for anyone who leads Israel astray: to purge the evil from the people, exemplary and, apparently, public punishment is prescribed: "all the people shall hear and fear..." and not allow any such thing again (Deut.13:11, 17:11).

Secondly, we find in the Damascus Document (CD) 12.2f. the following assertion: "Every man who speaks the words of deception (or: that lead astray) under the dominion of the spirits of Satan shall be judged according to the law relating to those possessed by a ghost or a familiar spirit", that is, according to Lev.20:27 - and that leads to the punishment of death by stoning. In the Temple Scroll (col.54-56) the main prescriptions of Deut. 13 and 17 are approved. Thus the Deuteronomic law was still known and would seem to have formed part of the legal prescriptions of the Qumran sect in the first century A.D. Indeed, it is plausible to suggest that in New Testament times the idea of "leading astray, deceiving, beguiling the people" underwent lengthy juristic definition in Jewish circles, with a view to clarifying which crimes qualified and for what punishment, even if the appropriate punishment could only be recommended, not

carried out.

Now all four Gospels record a judicial session in which Jews confront Jesus (cf. John 18:12-23) but the Synoptics agree on the investigation or trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin, though there are some difficulties with the procedure at that trial if the laws found in the Mishnaic tractate Sanhedrin were in force at the time. But those laws themselves, as we have pointed out, have been influenced by the legislation set out in Deut. 13 and 17, especially as it concerns the beguiler or seducer of the people (from whom a false prophet would be difficult to distinguish) and probably also the "rebellious elder" who in Deut. 17 is the man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest (who ministers before the Lord) or the judge. Now it seems to me that Jesus could have been brought to trial and condemnation on virtually any of these charges. Was his teaching not at variance with tradition? Was he not therefore effectively "a rebellious elder" so John Bowker, (Jesus and the Pharisees, 1973, pp.46-51), or a false prophet (as defined by Deut.13) - in short, a deceiver or seducer of the people?

The tradition concerning how the various charges are to be dealt with is reflected in M. Sanhedrin and Tos. Sanhedrin, and the latter may contain halakoth in a form earlier than that of the Mishnah (though the compilation of the Tosephta was later than the Mishnah and intended to elucidate and supplement our Mishnah (see J. Bowker, The Targums and the Rabbinic Literature, CUP, 1969, pp.62-63).<sup>1</sup> And from within that tradition we can explain some of the problems raised about the Jewish trial of Jesus. It is not our purpose or desire to argue for the historicity of every piece of the trial scene in Mark, nor to argue that the traditions reflected in the Mishnah and Tosephta Sanhedrin confirm every aspect of that trial. What it is plausible to put forward as a hypothesis is that the Sanhedrin did condemn Jesus and did so because it viewed him as a seducer or beguiler of the people in accordance with Deut. 13 and 17, passages which contribute directly to the later Jewish legal tradition. If this be granted, then the fact that the trial took place at a festival is not necessarily a violation of the law: the tradition of an exemplary public condemnation is implied, "so that all the people may hear, fear and do no more presumptuously." The unseemly haste



(no proper second session; activity at night) need not be insuperable difficulty either, for the tradition permits the trial to begin in the morning and end at night.

But what about the problem raised by the charge brought - in Mark, blasphemy, but in Luke Jesus' claim to be Son of God? Assuming that the Mishnaic definition of blasphemy was in force at the time, the words of Jesus (according to Mark) in which he reluctantly admits to being the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed, and goes on to speak of the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of glory (Mk.14:61-62) is not technically blasphemy, for says M. Sanhedrin 7.5 "The blasphemer is not culpable unless he pronounces the Name itself." However, it is thought by some that Jesus' implicit claim to Messiahship or to Sonship would have qualified as blasphemy in the sense of a blasphemous utterance: others are more impressed by the claim of Jesus (again implicit) to be Son of Man seated at the right hand of power (or: the Power). For Jesus to claim, before the highest religious court of the people, to be Son of Man at the right hand of power (i.e. of the Almighty) implies his judgship over that very court. That would be not only an affront to the Sanhedrin and the High Priest but an affront to Torah by which the Sanhedrin was constituted and on which it based its actions. That would indeed be blasphemous, if not outright blasphemy.

Now in Deut 21:22 there is an injunction that the body of one who had been executed for a capital offence should be hung on a gibbet until night-fall. In practice according to Josephus Antiq.4.202 (which reads, "He that blasphemes God, let him be stoned and let him hang upon a tree all that day; then let him be buried in an ignominious and obscure manner") and according to M. Sanhedrin 6.4 (which reads: "All that have been stoned must be hanged. So R. Eliezer. But the Sages say, None is hanged save the blasphemer and the idolater), the penalty of hanging was paid only by the blasphemer (and the idolater). Hanging was of course like the Roman form of crucifixion and, as is well know, some New Testament writers describe Jesus' crucifixion in terms of Deut.21:22-3, possibly on the assumption that his crime was indeed blasphemy. But, on the other hand, it could well be that it was necessary to invoke the charge of blasphemy in order to

explain the condemnation to hanging (i.e. crucifixion rather than stoning) of one whose real fault, in Jewish eyes, was that he was a seducer of the people and a leader towards idolatry. Concerning that kind of person the Jewish trial narrative makes a lot of sense even if every detail of it is not legally and historically confirmed.

One of the strengths of this approach is that it is very likely that the Romans would have seen (or been easily made to see) a seducer or beguiler as a threat to their own order - as was the case with Judas the Galilean - and consequently a degree of continuity may be seen to exist between the Jewish trial and the Roman proceedings. A second factor in its favour is that it allows the Sanhedrin's charge against Jesus to accord with that fragmentary but old Jewish tradition that Jesus perished because he led Israel astray into apostasy.

A final point remains to be made. Though this exploration gives fresh prominence to the Jewish proceedings against Jesus, we cannot speak in terms of judicial murder. Caiaphas and his people did what they had to do: they acted in accordance with the legislation of Deut.13 and 17 against a man perceived as a seducer or beguiler of the people. Pilate could have altered the course of the trial but did not, or did not succeed (by means of the Passover amnesty, if that is historical), and therefore bears his own responsibility for Jesus' death.

1.

Opinions regarding the age and value of the traditions found in the Tosephta still vary greatly. John Bowker (in The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, 1969) conveniently summarises the debate up to B. de Vries (pp.61-63). The noted American Jewish scholar, Jacob Neusner, has changed his view of Tosephta. Originally he was prepared to discuss Mishnah and Tosephta together, assuming that they were roughly of the same age (ca.200 A.D.) Later, he came to regard this as "a colossal error" and adopted the view that the Tosephta is secondary to the Mishnah. The Tosephta, he now claims, "is nothing less, than a document for the later history of the interpretation of Mishnah" (J. Neusner, "The Use of



Rabbinic Sources for the Study of Ancient Judaism" in W.S. Green ed. Approaches to Ancient Judaism, Vol.III (Scholars Press; Chico, California, 1981, p.12). But the following year, in a study of the Tosephta Tractate Gittin (Frührabbinisches Ehescheidungsrecht (Rome, Biblical Institute, 1982) Reinhard Neudecker claims that the Tosephta is important for the historical development of the Mishnah. He thinks that Neusner would have come to a different conclusion if he had studied more carefully the differences between the Vienna codex (edited and published by Saul Lieberman) and the Erfurt text, published by M.S. Zuckerman. (For this information I am indebted to Arland D. Jacobson's review of Neudecker's book in CBQ, vol.46 (1984) pp.353-4). I have no doubt that this debate about the value of the Tosephta will continue.

## THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA.

S. Hutchinson.

As might be expected in a country with a Calvinist ethos, the Bible has been accorded a position of high respect in South African society and frequent appeals have been made to its authority. 80.2% of Afrikaans secondary school children are reported to read the Bible regularly.

As a general rule, however, intensely conservative views have dominated the scene, and critical scholarship has been viewed with suspicion. There has been a reluctance to accept the views of others, the work of foreign scholars often being dismissed lightly or vehemently rejected out of hand (as happened with e.g. Bultmann). In other cases (e.g. John Bright) their work has been taken over and incorporated in a largely reproductive way.

A characteristic trait of Afrikaner scholarship has been its attempt to use Scripture in defence of apartheid in both Church and state. It is in this area that dialogue has taken place with Churchmen of other traditions - mainly on the continent of Europe - but that process has now ceased. It was felt that little progress was being made.

This article looks at both the general use of Scripture in the Dutch Reformed Churches and its specific application in the apartheid debate, the latter being better understood in the light of the former.

### Three Reformed Churches

The English description "The Dutch Reformed Church" is usually applied in the South African context to the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk - usually abbreviated to NGK. There are, however, three Reformed Churches that are exclusively white in their membership and Afrikaner in their ethos.

The NGK is the largest and the oldest. The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) was established by the Transvaal Boers in 1840 after the NGK had hesitated to follow them in their Trek into the interior. A further secession from the NHK produced in turn the Gereformeerde



Kerk(GK), which is the most conservative and traditional in its customs and practices, e.g. the exclusive use of psalmody in worship.

The NHK is the most liberal of the three in the sense of its being, by South African standards, relatively open to, and tolerant of, critical scholarship, though paradoxically it is also the most intransigent in racial policy. In the pastoral letter of the NHK General Synod of 1973 it is officially stated that the limitation of membership to whites is not an interim measure but a "permanent and unchanging principle that is founded on Scripture," an assertion that is backed up by the claim that God is the maker of nations and the sovereign of history, and by appeals to Genesis 10 and Psalm 86:9, which are used out of context as "proof texts".

The NGKA, NGSK and "Reformed" "daughter churches," established as a result of NGK missionary activity, inspired by Andrew Murray and intended to cater for Blacks, "Coloureds" and Indians respectively, are quite separate. The NKGa is very dependent through its black leadership on the parent NGK; the Reformed "Indian" Church is tiny, and only the NGSK of Dr. Allan Boesak shows much independence of thought.

In this article the NGK, the NHK and the GK will be referred to collectively as the "Dutch Reformed Churches", as they are white, Afrikaner and broadly similar to their approach to the use of Scripture. Except where specifically mentioned, no allusion is intended to Holland or to the non-white "daughter churches."

It is not suggested that the Dutch Reformed Churches are uniformly consistent in their approach to the Bible. There are differences both between the churches and within them. There are differing shades of opinion and the quality of the work varies. Nevertheless the amount of common ground is substantial.

A number of factors underlie this distinctive approach to Scripture: the Calvinistic heritage, the historical background in South Africa, local studies in general Biblical scholarship and an innate sympathy with fundamentalism.

### The Calvinistic Heritage

Writing from Stellenbosch in the heart of Afrikanerdom in 1962 Prof. J.C.G. Kotze observed, "It is the eternal glory of Calvinism that, in its philosophy of life and the world, it always endeavours to think in terms of theology and not of anthropology..it is therefore characteristic of this school of thought that it repeatedly turns to the fundamental Scriptural principles and standards." (1)

An examination of the book, "Principle and Practice in Race Relations," will clarify the kind of Calvinism that is in vogue. While there are five direct quotations from the works of John Calvin, there are no less than twelve from Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper (1837-1920) was both a prominent political leader in Holland, where he became prime minister, and a distinguished theologian in the tradition of the scholastic Calvinism that developed in the seventeenth century during and after the Synod of Dort.

In 1880 he started the orthodox "Free University" to teach the students his own distinctive brand of Calvinism and in 1886 he led a secession of 100,000 orthodox to form the Gereformeerde Kerk of the Netherlands. The theoretical basis of his political thought was the idea of the autonomy of the various social spheres, each of which had its own God-given rights.

He was sympathetic to the Boers. In his Stone Foundation Lectures on Calvinism he commended the struggle of the Boers in the Transvaal as "the heroism of old Calvinism (2) and asserted that "among the Kaffirs and Hottentots of Africa, even such a government as exists in Russia would be inconceivable." (3) His exposition of "unity" as the basic sin of Gen 11.1-9 is significant. "For in this very desire consisted the contumacy of the building of Babel's tower. Thus peoples and nations originated." (4) This exposition is basic to the Afrikaner case.

Kuyper's influence on the Dutch Reformed Churches was immense, and he is still quoted with respect as a commanding authority.

Kotze for example, arguing for the "rich diversity" of mankind in Scripture, appeals twice to Kuyper's "Het Calvinisme". "According to Scripture it cannot be doubted that God ordained such diversity and that this will remain to the end. Therefore we agree with A. Kuyper that the



demand today for a levelling down of the variety is in conflict with Scripture...."

".....He describes this unscriptural trend as an evil attempt which 'kills life by relegating it to uniformity...' as Kuyper clearly puts it 'There is no uniformity among people but pluriformity'"(5)

### Historical Background

Until 1829 the NGK recognised that racial separation was without biblical warrant. The Synod of that year declared that the administration of Holy Communion of colour or origin" was "an unshakeable principle based on the infallible Word of God, and that therefore all Christian communities and each individual Christian are obliged to think and act accordingly." (6)

By this stage separate congregations for "Coloureds" were already being formed, but as late as 1857 the NGK Synod reiterated that "it was desirable and Scriptural that, wherever possible, our members from among the heathen be received and incorporated in our existing congregations."

Under growing Afrikaner pressure, however, the 1857 Synod took the fateful step of passing a resolution which, for the first time, permitted separate services and buildings for whites and coloureds in the same parish.

At this stage it was pleaded (in the spirit of 1Cor.8) that this decision was concession to "the weakness of some." Leading Churchmen like Andrew Murray spoke out vehemently against what they perceived to be an unhealthy development.

With the passing of time, however, such separation became increasingly common until the earlier position of the Church was completely reversed and joint worship between the races was actively discouraged. It was at this stage that it began to be argued that apartheid was the answer to the country's problems and that determined and systematic attempts were made to provide a Scriptural justification for the position in which the NGK found itself. The practice came first, then the Biblical arguments and, finally, apartheid was passed on from church to state.

Ever since, the three churches have sought a biblical basis for their methods and policies. To list only the activities in the third quarter of this century, Synodical

meetings and conferences have been held to discuss the matter at Pretoria (1953), Johannesburg (1954), Potchefstroom (1958), Johannesburg (1959 and 1960), as well as special missionary conferences at Bloemfontein (1950) and Kroonstadt (1960), and an ongoing ad hoc study commission dating from 1956. An important report entitled "Race Relations in South Africa" was adopted by Synod in 1966.

"On all these occasions very particular attention was paid to light cast by the Word of God on our race relations." (7) The climax of this process was the publication in 1974 of the well-known and internationally studied Synodal Report which, in its English translation, bears the title "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture." Before assessing it it is necessary to consider the general climate of Afrikaner biblical research.

#### Pretoria Symposium

The Institute for Theological Research in the University of South Africa took as the theme for its second symposium in 1979 the topic "Scripture and the use of Scripture." It dealt with a number of issues that are currently topical, including the impact of black theology.

Most relevant to the theme of this article was a paper by Prof. J.A. Loader (Dept of Semitic Languages, University of Pretoria) entitled "The Use of the Bible in Conventional South African Theology" - which was interpreted to mean the handling of the Bible within the three Afrikaans Churches. (8)

Loader provides a useful summary in English of Afrikaans books and articles in journals of theological research like Hervormde Teologiese Studies. A review of its contents shows what the current issues are (While the symposium itself took place five years after "Landman", much of the material considered pre-dated it.)

#### The Scopus Concept.

First is the scopus concept, looking for the central theme or "purpose" of the Bible. More work has been done on this line by biblical scholars in the GK and NGK traditions than by those in the NHK tradition.

Prominent among these is J.A. Heynes, who strongly

influenced the Report "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture," known as the "Landman" Report after its chairman Ds W.A. Landman.

Heynes' writing is preoccupied with the quest for the scopus of the Bible, which he finds in the Kingdom of God. "The Kingdom is the centre of the Bible and the centre of this centre is Jesus Christ." He follows the consequences of this scopus theology to their logical conclusions and writes of "scopic" and "peripheral" authority, reliability etc.

Prof. A. König emphasises the age and the different interpretations of the concept since Augustine. He feels that the authority and inspiration of the Bible must be blurred where there is a lack of clarity concerning the scopus. The issue should not be narrowed to "God's purpose of salvation" but it should include his comprehensive purpose of creation."

J.T. du Fürstenberg thinks that the modern study of the Bible, with its concern for issues like context, historical setting and literary genres, is one of the prime causes of current interest in the biblical scopus.

He maintains that, in view of the variegated contents of the Bible, the scopus issue should be treated with due regard for the different nuances, and not in a unilinear way. While various qualifications exist, christological centrality is the dominating aspect arrived at by attending to the use of the Old Testament in the New. Therefore Christ is the centre of the whole Bible.

Loader concludes his review of this topic by accepting that the scopus idea is legitimate and necessary for reflection on the purpose and tendency of the Bible but he pleads for the concept not to be overstrained. Biblical literature is too complex in nature to be conceived of in terms of a unitary statement. He mentions the "danger of impoverishing the many-coloured face of the Bible by trying to harmonise its themes, tensions, theologies and counter-theologies into a central ordering concept. Rather the God of the Bible than any one of the themes in the Bible is its scopus."

### The Authority of the Bible.

In the Afrikaans literature the authority of the Bible



is discussed but is often regarded unproblematically. It tends to be implied rather than considered in its own right.

Heynes is an exception. He pays extensive attention to the topic, and derives biblical authority from God's authority. He opposes the distinction - traditional since the seventeenth century - between "historical" and "normative" authority, arguing that this would mean treating the authority of the Bible as merely relative.

Instead he makes a complicated and rather forced distinction between "scopic authority", which works directly and confronts us with norms for obedience, and "peripheral authority" which works indirectly and confronts us with models for obedience.

This distinction enables him to maintain the infallibility of the Bible without having to resort to fundamentalism, but he fails to demonstrate a method by which we can determine what has peripheral authority and what has scopic authority.

Generally however the question of authority is not considered as thoroughly as this. The fact of biblical authority is just unproblematically accepted and implied throughout the literature.

In his summary Loader adds that, in this context, the problem of biblical authority is not analysed as a problem of ancient/modern but is rather related to the opposition of divine/human.

Similarly little or no attention is given to the consequence of modern linguistics for the study of the Bible. The study of literary structure and the like have yet to make any significant impact.

### Hermeneutics

On hermeneutics Loader suggests that this topic features mostly as a matter of the relation between the Testaments and as a Christological understanding of the Bible, though disapproval of Rudolf Bultmann is also a conspicuous feature.

The NHK theologian J.P. Oberholzer, for example, argues that the Old Testament testifies in its historical context to Christ. The two Testaments should be read in each other's light. First we have to determine what light

is shed by the whole of the Old Testament canon on the problems of a text within it, and next that of the New Testament. Great prominence is given to the use of the Old Testament in the New and quotations play the primary role.

The New Testament scholar, E.P. Groenewald, defines hermeneutics as the art of interpretation, "in other words it is equal to the totality of Christian theology, that is, as the exposition of the meaning of Holy Scripture for the present."

He surveys the so-called new hermeneutic of Fuchs and Ebeling, expressing appreciation for their idea of a "Sprachereignis" or "Wortgeschehen". The appealing word of a bygone situation retains its appeal. This word only effectively brings about contact between God and the human situation when it is accepted in faith. This contact takes place in Christ, which means that the new hermeneutic is a Christological matter.

### Fundamentalism

One of the most significant factors underlying the use of Scripture in the Afrikaans tradition is its sympathy with the fundamentalist position. This is seen particularly in material issued by scholars of reasonable standing but intended for popular and/or secular educational use.

James Barr identifies three distinctive marks of Anglo-American fundamentalism: (i) a strong emphasis on the infallibility of the Bible, usually connected with the doctrine of inspiration and understood as inerrancy; (ii) a strong hostility to the modern critical study of the Bible (iii) a conviction that those who do not share its viewpoint (i.e. critical scholars) are not true Christians (9).

Many of the controversies in this field tend to arise in an Old Testament context, probably because fundamentalist ideas of infallibility and inspiration work better when clear pictures can be formed of the "authors" of the various biblical books, and there are more problems of this type in the Old Testament than in the New.

The result is that concern about authorship figures prominently in fundamentalist thinking generally - and

S. African writers are no exception. Few Afrikaans scholars admit to being fundamentalists, but it is a fact that fundamentalism remains a powerful influence among a surprising number of them.

J.D. du Toit.

The name of Jakob David du Toit (1877-1953) is of basic importance for an appreciation of attitudes to Scripture in the Dutch Reformed Churches. An Afrikaner by birth, he spent a few years (1900-1903) in Kuyper's Free University and finally became Professor of Theology at Potchefstroom.

He was the compiler of the Afrikaans Psalter (1936) which is regarded as the finest poetic production of its type in the Dutch-Flemish-Afrikaans group of languages.

He played a major part in the translation of the Bible into Afrikaans which was completed in 1932. The significance of this becomes apparent when it is realised that in at least two of the passages traditionally quoted in support of apartheid (Deut. 32.8f; Acts 17.26) the case stands or falls according to the way the verse is translated (cf. the debate in other contexts over such translations as Isaiah 7.14 "Behold a virgin shall conceive...").

Du Toit not only had a major part in the 1932 Afrikaans translation, his influence was apparent in the later 1954 edition and still pervades current translations. In the 1974 Landman Report of the NGK in particular (as will be seen later) the traditional renderings are still adhered to. In the case of the Deuteronomy text, however, a certain qualification is added, "Although Deut. 32.8 has no firm interpretation (the text is subject to dispute) it nevertheless seems to indicate.."  
(10).

Another phenomenon exemplified by du Toit is the influence of "civil religion", which J.J. Burden defines as the religion of the man in the street, "those feelings, symbols and acts that bind a group together and are propagated by politicians with reference to the Bible"(11).

Du Toit was intensely patriotic. He served as a chaplain to the Boer army in the South African war, and love of his fatherland and admiration for its history



shine through clearly in his copious poetic productions, which by themselves give him a claim to fame as a man of letters.

While civil religion in the South African sense did not originate with Du Toit (A. Kuyper was not only a theologian but an eminent statesman and Prime Minister of Holland) it coloured his thinking and, as a result of his status, was bequeathed by him to later generations. Civil religion has clearly influenced the way Scripture has been used by Afrikaner apologists for the status quo in Church and state.

Du Toit's writings on biblical topics are marked by three main characteristics: (i) a vigorous exposition of his particular theory of the infallibility of the Bible (ii) an intense hostility to the critical approach to the study of the Bible (iii) specific condemnation of critical scholarship as apostasy and falsehood. These attitudes of his left a deep and widespread influence on all three Afrikaner Churches.

### Die Verklardende Bybel

The results of these attitudes can be illustrated by reference to the "Verklarende Bybel", an important and popular Bible commentary. (The full title is "Die Afrikaanse Bybel met Verklarende Aantekeninge"). It is widely accepted as a standard work of reference and numbered among its contributors. theologians of all three Afrikaner Churches.

Some quotations from it (obtained through Loader's English summary cf. supra) show how it accommodates either the fundamentalist position or what Barr terms the "optimal conservative" - i.e. a basically fundamentalist position formulated in such a way that the author, if challenged, can maintain that he has left open the possibility of an alternative position.

In the introduction to Exodus, S.J. du Plessis (whose exposition of Gen.10 as "differentiation of the human race into nations...as part of God-willed diversity" is cited with approval in the Landman Report)(12), says cautiously that "Moses could be the author."

He mentions passages that refer to Moses engaging in writing activities and presents this as an argument for the authorship of the Pentateuch by Moses. He does not state the arguments on the other side, contenting

himself by merely suggesting that he has given them consideration before making up his mind on the point, thereby implying that his own judgement is sound, and that the opinions of opposing scholars are wide of the mark. The animosity to the critical approach is obvious and the effect is to confirm the reader in a Totius-type fundamentalism.

On Deutero-Isaiah Prof. P.A. Verhoef writes that "some interpreters" ascribe Isaiah 40-66 to "a prophet" from exilic times. This studied vagueness leaves the average reader with the impression that the later dating is quite incorrect, as J.D. du Toit also believed.

In his introduction to Daniel, S. du Toit (son of J.F. du T.) states dogmatically that "the reliability and historical credibility of the book has been proved unequivocally (!)."

He further explains that his exposition takes as its starting point the assumption that what is encountered here is a straight forward historical account, thus showing little appreciation of the literary genres to be found in the book. In keeping with his tradition he gives the impression, without explicitly saying so, that "reliability" and "historical correctness" are interchangeable concepts.

To cite one final example of the Verklarende Bybel's approach, T.F.J. Dryer maintains that the book of Jonah reports an actual historical fact, and in support of this assertion advances three proofs:- (i) the mention of a prophet Jonah in II Kings 14-25, (ii) the Gospels, where Jesus' acceptance of the historicity of the book is regarded as normative, and (iii) the appeal to divine omnipotence (God can command a fish, therefore the book is a straight-forward historical account).

In this commentary, authorship and factual correctness are regarded as questions of paramount importance, while the critical problems are not brought to the reader's attention. Modern scholarship is either ignored or dismissed lightly, while it is repeatedly suggested (or implied) that learning is on the side of the contributor (cf. the craving for "intellectual respectability" mentioned by Barr). It is also suggested that "the witness of scripture itself" is on the side of such contributors over against the critical scholars.

While such ideas could be paralleled in the devotional writings of other traditions, the significance of these

articles is their relatively recent date and the academic standing of their authors. While the Verklarende Bybel is not an official production of the Afrikaans Churches, it must be taken as reflecting a major current of opinion within them.

### Scripture and Race Relations.

It is against this background of "optimal conservatism" that Dutch Reformed use of the Bible in questions of race relations is to be evaluated. All three Afrikaner Churches have pronounced repeatedly on the subject and, despite certain differences of tradition and emphasis in matters of race relations and theological scholarship, this has in practice made little difference to their use of Scripture, which J.J. Burden epitomised as "referential" (13).

Until about 1950 the usual approach was to argue that apartheid was directly derived from Scripture, and was thus a God-given policy. E.P. Groenewald writing in 1947 could comment with great certainty in "Apartheid and Guardianship in the Light of Holy Scripture"(14) that there are many statements in the Bible that give fixed principles with regard to race relations. He concluded that the Bible teaches the unity of mankind, but that God consciously divided mankind into races, peoples and tongues; that apartheid is the will of God and that it leads to national, social and religious apartheid, though there is a "spiritual" unity in Christ.

Since then, however, largely as a result of dialogue with (and pressure from) churches abroad and other churches within South Africa, the emphasis has changed. Recent productions are no longer simply an apology for all aspects of apartheid on biblical grounds.

Kotze's "Principles and Practices in Race Relations" published in 1962 marks one step along this road. "It is a cautious book. The author does his best not to repulse or embitter". "An honest search is made in it for fundamental Scriptural truths in so far as they touch human relations". (15) Nevertheless the change was sufficient for Die Kerkbode, the official organ of the NGK, to sound a warning note, "There is much in the book with which one can heartily agree....but in many respects it must be a confusing book to the ordinary reader" (16).



It was to be the forerunner of the Landman Report of 1974. Indeed one might at first glance assume that Landman was simply a re-working and updating of Kotze, but the relationship is not one of direct literary dependence. Kotze marks a stage in the development of the church tradition out of which both documents emerged.

### The Landman Report

The Landman Report, "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture" to quote the exact title of the English translation - like most of these productions it originally appeared in Afrikaans - represents the official thinking of the NGK Church at the present time, though a revision is now in progress.

It consists of 66 propositions in bold type, which represent official policy, together with longer explanatory statements which were merely "noted" by the Synod. It has major sections on Scriptural data, the "horizontal" dimension of the Church's work, the Church and social justice, the Church and missions, and marriage, including mixed marriage. It is the first of these sections that is of immediate interest here.

The Report lays down for itself the following hermeneutic approach:- "We can only truly discern what the Scriptures teach on relations between races and peoples if we correctly interpret and utilize the Scriptures. The Bible was never intended to be used as a scientific text-book for sociology and anthropology. Also one must avoid the danger of allowing the "historic situation" to function as a hermeneutic principle according to which the Scriptures are interpreted...."

"The Bible must be interpreted in accordance with recognised, reformed, scientific hermeneutic principles in keeping with its actual intention - it is not a scientific text-book....The Scriptures must not be used biblicistically...In dealing with Scriptural data the Church will constantly have to be aware of the central theme of its preaching - i.e. the way of salvation in Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God - and it will have to indicate and extol the norms that coincide with this theme in all spheres of life." (17)

William Vorster in a lengthy and unsympathic article gives a detailed analysis of these claims. (18). He

demonstrates that the Report fails to live up to its own claims. It does not define what "reformed, scientific ..... principles" are, and is inconsistent in that it does allow its own historic situation in South Africa to function as the hermeneutic principle according to which the Scriptures are interpreted. "Race" is read into the text and elevated to be a keynote of the Bible.

Despite professions to the contrary the use of the Bible does seem to be "biblicist", whether that undefined term is taken to mean "out of context" or is used as a euphemism for "fundamentalist."

Daniel von Allmen of the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches, who produced a critical study of the Report entitled (in its English translation) "Theology - Advocate or Critic of Apartheid?" and whose tone is more fairminded and balanced than some reviews, queried whether "justice is done to these affirmations in the Report as a whole." (19) (It is much to be regretted that for some unexplained reason von Allmen decided that it was "inappropriate to examine in close detail the way in which the Bible is actually interpreted in the Report.")

### The Basic Apartheid Texts

Over the years the Dutch Reformed Churches have habitually appealed to five main passages of Scripture in defence of their pro-apartheid position. The same basic texts re-appear in the Landman Report, along with over 40 others, most of which are cited incidentally and add little to the thrust of the argument. The classic proof texts are as follows:-

Gen. 1.28 "And God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and increase and fill the earth and subdue it." This is taken to imply that "ethnic diversity is in its very origin in accordance with the will of God for this dispensation" (20).

This illustrates the propensity of the Report (and the whole tradition which underlies it) to indulge in "eisegesis", and read into the text racial ideas which are simply not there on any objective reading.

The Report wrongly interprets this verse (and the parallels cited in Gen. 9.1,7) as commands requiring human obedience, whereas "God blessed them and God said..." is merely a literal translation of the typical Hebrew idiom of parataxis. "Man received from the hand of God

also the blessing that empowers him to reproduce and multiply." (21).

Gen. 11.1-9, the story of the tower of Babel. In the entire history of DRC theologians about race relations this is the cardinal text. Leaving aside the question of whether it is literal history - as the Report seems to take for granted, referring to "the event itself," - two issues are raised here. What was the sin involved and what did God intend by his reaction to it?

The Report looking at this passage through the spectacles of its own preconceived ideology, sees the sin as being that of a defiance of God's "command" at creation (1.28) and to Noah (9.1-7) that mankind should divide into separate "volke" with different languages and therefore different cultures.

It further deduces that in re-establishing this process of differentiation, God now extended it by dividing mankind into different races as well, and on the basis it concludes that the policy of "autogenous development" is accorded a Scriptural basis.

In an interesting Freudian slip the Report quotes from S. du Toit's book "Revelation in the Old Testament" and uncritically accepts his allusion to "a division which resulted in continual tension and conflict among peoples, something which, according to the Scriptures, will endure to the very last." What Scriptures? (22)

Once again the Report, without any warrant from the text, extends it to race. Indeed it shows a degree of perversity in making race rather than language the fundamental issue. It uses the text to justify the separation of races whereas the separation of the various language groups is never mentioned. It further uses the text to attack marriages between different racial groups, but not between different language groups which would be a logical corollary.

Deut. 32.8-9, "When the Most High portioned out the nations when he dispersed the sons of mankind, he set the limits of the peoples according to the numbers of the sons of God (or "sons of Israel"), while the Lord's share was his own people, Jacob was the portion he allotted himself."

This is another basic text in NGK thinking. In the earlier report issued in 1966 (23) J.D. Vorster quoted it as decisive. The key to the interpretation of the text,



however, is the question of which reading should be adopted.

There are two possibilities (i) "sons of Israel", which is supported by A.V., R.V., R.S.V. marg., N.I.V. and significantly - Afrikaans 1032/3 and 1954, (ii) "sons of God," which is the rendering of R.S.V., N.E.B., and G.N.B., supported by LXX and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Von Rad thinks it "as good as certain" that this is the correct reading. (24)

The sense is then that God assigned one or other nation to every "heavenly being" as vice-regent but chose Israel as his own people over whom he would rule directly. The passage thus has nothing to do with "homelands" or event territories, but with God's election of Israel. Acts 2.5-11, the miracle of the tongues at Pentecost. In its fourth chapter, dealing with the Church and missionary work, the Report maintains that "the great language miracle of Whit Sunday confirms that it is the will of God that each man should hear of the great deeds of God in his own language....the Christian faith must be Africanised in Africa." (25)

While it is reasonable to argue that missionary work and Bible translation should be extended to as many languages as possible, there is no hint in Acts 2 that every person must hear the gospel in his own language only or that each language group must then form its own autonomous Church, which is what the NGK has done, establishing the NGKA for black Africans, the NGSK for "coloureds" and the "Reformed Church in Africa" for Indians. The Report misses the point that, in this reversal of Babel, converts from differing backgrounds were brought into the one Church.

Acts 17.16, (God) "made the entire human race from one (man) to dwell upon the face of the whole earth, having determined set seasons and the boundaries of their habitation."

The Report quotes this text with approval as again confirming its obsession with the idea that "diversity was implicit in the fact of creation," and that God appointed peoples their respective homelands. Once again a question of translation arises. Should "pan ethnos anthropon" be rendered "every nation of men" or "the whole human race?"

Landman ignores the context of Paul's argument. The Athenians claimed that they were "sprung from the soil of

Attica," and therefore superior to others. Against such ideas of racial superiority Paul asserts the fundamental unity of all men. As elsewhere, the interpretation is strained and partisan.

### Positive Points

Two positive points must be made. (i) Many sections of the Report, both in the parts dealing with Scriptural data and in the parts dealing with more general matters of social justice etc., are commendable. The Old Testament passages dealing with the foreigner or alien are honestly expounded, even if the lesson is not then applied to the Christian Church. It is recognised that "The Scriptures teach and uphold the essential unity of mankind and the primordial relatedness and fundamental equality of all peoples." (26) Most mainstream Christian readers would accept the majority of its statements, whether referring to Scripture or to matters of "social justice", and would welcome the softening (however slight) on mixed marriages, which are now rated as "high undesirable" rather than "impossible", and on mixed services, now (theoretically) possible "on occasions" if sanctioned by the local Church council.

(ii) The "curse of Ham argument" is specifically rejected. "There is no Scriptural basis for relating the subordinate position of some present day peoples to the curse on Canaan." (27)

Perverse exposition of Gen. 9.25 had a marked and unfortunate influence on some Western thinking. One example (from the U.S.A.) should be given: "Ham was a word which meant black, not only referring to skin colour but also to the very disposition of his mind. He was characterized as having always been wicked ("cursed Ham" - not "cursed be Ham"), with violence of temper, exceedingly prone to acts of ferocity and cruelty, involving murder, wars, butcheries and even cannibalism, including beastly lusts and lasciviousness.... dishonesty, treachery, low-mindedness and malice" (28).

This approach, which must be mentioned in any consideration of the "Scriptural account of the origin of nations," has long been rejected by the Dutch Reformed Churches. "It is simply not true that Ham and all his descendants were for ever cursed." (29)

### Conclusions:

The use of Scripture in the Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa has been influenced by the scholastic Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper and by their own ecclesiastical history.

The Pretoria Symposium of 1979 summarised recent Afrikaner studies on the "scopus" and authority of the Bible, hermeneutics etc. Despite a formal repudiation of fundamentalism and biblicism there has been a strong bias in the Afrikaner tradition towards "optimal conservatism."

The understanding of some texts with an alleged bearing on race relations has been strongly influenced by the historic situation. "Race" has often been "eisegeted" into Scripture, thus leaving an impression of racism.

The Landman Report presents a traditional exegesis in a somewhat muted form and thus marks a minor watershed in the development of biblical interpretation in the Afrikaner community. A revision of the Report is currently in hand and its publication is awaited with interest.

NOTES:

- (1) "Principle and Practice in Race Relations"  
J.C.G. Kotze (Stellenbosch) 1962 p.11
- (2) "Calvinism - Six Stone Foundation Lectures"  
Abraham Kuyper (Eerdmans) 1943 p.40
- (3) op. cit. p.84
- (4) op. cit. p.90
- (5) Kotze op.cit. p.70.f
- (6) cf. Douglas Baz. "The Bible and Apartheid" p.138  
apud "Apartheid is a Heresy" John de Gruchy and  
Charles Villa-Vicencio (eds). Lutterworth 1983
- (7) Kotze op.cit. p.13
- (8) "The Use of the Bible in Conventional South African  
Theology" in W.S. Vorster (ed) "Scripture and the  
use of Scripture" (Pretoria) 1979
- (9) "Fundamentalism." James Barr (London) 1977
- (10) "Human Relations and the South African Scene in  
the Light of Scripture" (The "Landman" Report)  
(Pretoria) 1976)
- (11) J.J. Burden in "Scripture and the Use of Scripture"  
W.S. Vorster (ed) p.25.
- (12) "Landman" p.13
- (13) J.J. Burden op.cit. p.25
- (14) cited by W.S. Vorster in "Apartheid is a Heresy" p.96
- (15) Kotze op.cit. p.8f.
- (16) cf. Kotze op.cit. p.9.
- (17) "Landman" p.9ff.



NOTES:

- (18) cf. "Apartheid is a Heresy" pp. 96-109.
- (19) "Theologie zwischen Rechtfertigung und Kritik der Apartheid" ("Theology - Advocate or Critic of Apartheid?") Daniel von Allmen (Berne 1977 p.7
- (20) "Landman" p.14
- (21) "Das Erste Buch Mose" Von Rad (Göttingen) 1964
- (22) "Landman" p.17
- (23) cf. D. Bax in "Apartheid is a Heresy" p.124
- (24) G. von Rad "Das Fünfte Buch Mose" (Göttingen 1964) p.140
- (25) "Landman" p.87
- (26) "Landman" p.13
- (27) "Landman" p.19
- (28) "Bible Defense of Slavery;" and Origin, Fortunes and History of the Negro Race. Josiah Priest (U.S.A.) 1852.
- (29) "Landman" p.19

The Gospel of Mark: Pastoral response to a  
Life or Death Situation?  
Some Reflections

E. A. Russell

The title of this paper assumes that Mark has a coherent aim which integrates his gospel, i.e. that to understand him we must have a so-called "holistic" approach. The impact of a reading of all Mark's gospel by Alec McCowen in the Opera House Belfast aroused people to an awareness of how effective it could be. Such a thing had not been experienced before. Since, however, the material Mark uses was probably oral, from differing situations and with differing aims perhaps, such an integration would be all the more remarkable. It would of course not be surprising if such traditions at times fit in uneasily. But even granting this, it is the contention of this paper that single dominant theme is discernible, however loosely it may appear at times. /1

If then enquiry is made after the theme of the gospel of Mark, the answer could hardly be closer at hand than in the opening verse: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (1.1) ie taking the punctuation as being a full stop after "Son of God". This is not meant to be a deliberate ignoring of the familiar textual problem as to whether the ending should be "Jesus Christ" or "Son of God". It is a recognition that, since the evidence is evenly balanced and textual principles adduced in support of either, the occurrences of the phrase "Son of God", often at crucial points in the gospel, would persuade even a conscientious scribe with his mind on lectionary needs to decide on the fuller form. It does not affect the sense so much and it can hardly be denied that "Jesus Christ, Son of God" gives an added rhetorical and solemn emphasis. Such an argument of course is not necessary if the fuller form is the original reading. In support of the verse as a whole is its suggestion of being a kerygmatic form - it represents the beginning of the gospel which proclaims Jesus Christ. Mark is the only gospel writer to

use the word euaggelion in the heading to his gospel. Paul claimed "We preach Christ crucified." An examination of the structure reveals a focussing on the Passion as the climactical point of the gospel. Does Mark believe that the gospel as preached is "the power of God for salvation"? The form of the first verse would at least suggest a proclamation of Christ and why proclaim if results were not expected?

At which point in history, then, did Mark come to this decisive moment when he set down the first word of his gospel? Most scholars would agree on the period around 70AD but not all would agree about the place. Is it Galilee ("He goes before you into Galilee": Mark 16.7) and is Marxsen correct in claiming that Mark's theme is to say that Jesus is coming soon to meet his own people in Galilee? /2 Is this the complete message of Mark? What about material that does not appear to have any connection with such a theme? And why is there such reluctance to accept the church tradition expressed in the Anti-Marcionite Prologue that "after the departure of Peter himself, he (Mark) wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy" since there is no firm evidence to the contrary. This is not to deny the problems attached to such a tradition but there does not seem any decisive reason for refusing the possibility that genuine Petrine reminiscences are imbedded in the Marcan tradition and that Mark wrote the gospel at Rome. /3

That Mark should write a "gospel" at all does suggest that to some extent at least the hope of Jesus' coming back had receded into the background. He feels it now necessary to place some record in the hands of the church. If he is John Mark, he has waited a long time to do so

This reminds us that from time to time throughout the history of the church leaders may misunderstand and perhaps try to shape divine history after the pattern of their own thought. Mark shared the misunderstanding of his church. Here there is no claim to infallibility nor to understanding what the Holy Spirit is saying. Mark is forced by circumstances to recognize that he is mistaken. He cannot delay longer. The record must be committed to writing.

But there is something else, even more sobering than this.



The Neronian persecution has taken place. Tacitus sets out for us the appalling record of what happened to members of the Roman Church:

They were not only put to death but put to death with insult, in that they were dressed up in the skins of beasts to perish either by the worrying of dogs or on crosses or by fire, or when the daylight failed, they were burnt to serve as lights by night."

(Gwatkin's translation: Vol 1, p78)

Tradition, accepted by the church in the absence of other evidence, records that the two leading apostles, Peter and Paul, perished in this onslaught. This would be devastating for the mixed Gentile/Jewish church. It would not be surprising if the number of apostates was high. How many would be able to face up to the prospect of an agonizing death by fire or crucifixion or being torn apart by dogs, deliberately starved to make them more vicious?

The martyrdom of Peter and Paul at Rome and the tradition that emerged from it have every likelihood of having an historical basis. It is hardly necessary to underline how traumatic such a double disaster would have been for the church. It should be noted that from very early days, the concept of the believer being identified with his Lord in suffering and death appears to have loomed large. Paul seeks a share eg in the sufferings of Christ (Phil 3.10); he seeks to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1.24). The first epistle of Peter talks of the vicarious suffering of Christ as an "example to the members of the church to follow his steps." (2.21f) Parallels have often been drawn between the account of Jesus' death and that of Stephen in Acts (ch.8), a striking example of identification. Part of our problem is the lack of any clear reference to the death of Peter and Paul in Mark's gospel. Whatever may have been the temptation to introduce a reference, Mark preserves the traditions of Jesus that he has received without any obvious embellishment. The pericope on fasting is an example. It has

to do with the death of Jesus and the fasting expressive of sorrow that belongs to that time. The present time with Jesus present is the time of joy. It is also the time of the presence of Peter, and the period of a wedding celebration: "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?.....The days will come when the groom is taken away from them. And then on that day they will fast" (2.19f) The verb apairō can imply a use of force. Jesus was "torn away" from the twelve and the church by the crucifixion. Similarly Peter (and Paul) shared this experience of being "torn away" by hostile authorities and martyred. The church in the aftermath of the persecution of 64AD knew something of the distress experienced at the time of the violent death of Jesus and it could take comfort in this identification. The disciples, represented in James and John, are assured that they will share the baptism (of suffering) Jesus underwent (10.39) - a verse that may have given rise to the tradition that James and John died together - but confirmed in the experience of Mark's church. When Mark ends his gospel with the words, "For they were afraid" (16.8), he is speaking of the women who fled from the tomb. This unusual ending has never been satisfactorily explained. Is it possible that Mark, when he stressed the "fear" by giving it an emphatic position, was addressing the Roman church as it had entered into the implications of the stunning news that Peter and Paul were martyred?

It is possible to assume, then, that the church at Rome had its own quota of those who, under the threat of torture, denied Christ. Like Peter they too had been guilty of desertion. They too had claimed that they had no knowledge of Jesus. It would be only natural for them to feel that Jesus would have nothing to do with them, that forgiveness could hardly exist in the face of such shameful actions nor any place they might have in the church. Is this why Mark makes a special point of describing the denial of Peter instead of avoiding it with the excuse that it would not do the church any good? But Mark does not attempt to lighten the ugly details. A glance at the account will show the build up to a climax when Peter curses and says specifically, "I do not know the man you are talking about." (14.71; previously he only denied that he belonged to Jesus' group). The curse inveighed on himself

serves to underline the seriousness of the denial. Mark may be saying: "You too have denied Christ. You feel he does not want you any more. Peter was like that. He felt so remorseful that he could not believe that Jesus would receive him back. Yet Jesus was ready to forgive. Wasn't that why he mentioned Peter specially? 'Tell Peter that I will meet him in Galilee.'" This then is how Mark addresses a church that has faltered and compromised and wriggled out of danger and is now filled with remorse, a church that desperately needed assurance that a new beginning was possible. This was how it was in "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ". The church would have an added encouragement. Peter who disowned his Lord shamefully, found the power of Jesus' forgiveness and renewal through the Holy Spirit and when in the time of rough and searching persecution he was called to face the ultimate challenge of death after the pattern of Jesus he did not fail.

In the interpretation given to the parable of the sower where we find clear reflections of the experience of the later church, it does speak of those who receive the word with joy, stick it for a time, then "when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away." (4.17) This could reflect the actual experience of the church Mark addresses, of severe testing and apostasy. Indeed it is hardly appropriate to use "tribulation or persecution" of what we know of the disciples' experiences in the gospel traditions. The word "tribulation" (thlipsis) is almost a technical term for sufferings of the end-time. In the so-called "Little Apocalypse" (Mark 13) there are statements of general application but which, when placed in the context of the Neronian persecution - if the phrasing itself does not derive from it - take on a special thrust eg being delivered up to councils, standing before governors and kings for Jesus' sake, brother delivering up brother to death, the father his child, children rising up against parents and having them put to death. (9.12) Here is an example of the "sword" Jesus talked about, the hostility within the Jewish home against members of the family who follow Jesus whether son or daughter, brother or sister, son and father. The experiences of the OT saints are spoken of in similar



terms. They become forms of expression for the experiences of the early church, jargon bound up with the end-time. It would not be surprising if they recall some of the things that happened to the church in Nero's time. The rise of belief in a Nero redevivus shows what terror Nero created for the church in his time. And what about the mysterious phrase to bdelugma tēs erēmōseōs. (The Abomination of Desolation), taken from Daniel, and expressing the nightmare of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, and entering into the tradition as indicative of antichrist and of the terror let loose on the world at the end time?

### The theme of the gospel

It has been claimed that the theme of the gospel of Mark is: "The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God". assuming we punctuate with a full stop after "Son of God". /4 But other punctuations are of course possible. If, for example, a comma is inserted after "Son of God", "the beginning" may refer simply to the OT quotation: "Behold, I am sending my messenger before you...." It is interesting that Mark only rarely refers back to the OT. /5 Thus here his binding together of what God said in the past with Jesus and the Baptist can be of special significance. This in itself serves to bring out the stature of Jesus Christ, Son of God, as one whose destiny is in the hands of God, as someone within his plan which now begins to unfold. We may note the first line of the OT quotation: "Behold, I am sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way" Here we have God addressing Jesus in the period before history began ie there is a suggestion of pre-existence. /6 If this is accepted - and the statement of Jesus about his mission to preach, "For this reason I came out(exēlthon)" could serve to corroborate this view - then the position and pre-eminence of Jesus is further emphasized. If Mark goes out of his way to stress the uniqueness of Jesus, it need not be unrelated to the need to do so if the church feels Jesus has let it down.

But the quotation speaks of "my messenger before you". In Malachi the Hebrew runs "my messenger before me", where it would appear that to accommodate Jesus and his uniqueness even the OT authority is restricted. The forerunner goes ahead, not of God, but of Jesus. The equation of Jesus with

God implicit in this re-asserts validity and authority for Jesus where it has been questioned.

### John the Baptist

Another line of approach may be mentioned that alters the interpretation. This is to treat the OT quotation as a parenthesis, applying the arche (beginning) to the appearance of the Baptist. The "beginning" is when John appeared "baptizing....and preaching". Is it possible to claim that John is included in the "beginning of the gospel"? The ambiguity of the position of the Baptist in the gospel accounts is familiar. Does he belong to the old dispensation and, therefore, what the Q source states - "He who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" - is true? (Lk 9.48; Matt 11.11) Or is he so closely identified with the coming of Jesus that he breaks through the Jew/Jewish Christian barrier? /7 Is there a growing appreciation or evaluation of the role of the Baptist? In Luke, for example, John appears to "preach the gospel" (euaggelizomai) to the people. Does the Greek word mean merely "to preach" or does it mean to "preach the gospel"?

It should not be forgotten that in Luke the same word is used of the proclamation of the angel Gabriel to Zachariah: "I was sent...to bring you this good news" (Lk 1.19) and, again, of the angel to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people." (2.10) It is a word stamped upon the whole of Luke's twofold work, bringing an atmosphere of joy with it that spills over into the nativity chapters, reckless of any divisions Jew/Christian. The joy of the time of Jesus is retrospective and spans the two dispensations. It might be worth exploring why Luke leaves out the noun euaggelion, gospel. And, equally, why does Mark not use euaggelizomai? Matthew has only one occurrence of euaggelizomai which he borrows from Q (11.5; Lk 7.22). But those who "bring good tidings," apart from Jesus and the Baptist, are in Luke angelic beings. Thus the baptist is placed alongside the angels and shares in the proclamation of the good news. (Lk 1.19; 2.10; 3.18). Here the high position of the baptist is stressed and, further, his sharing in the proclamation of Jesus is secured for, when Jesus opens his ministry, he speaks of the Holy Spirit that he anointed him to "preach the good news" (4.18)

The heightening of the Baptist's role is further confirmed by Matthew where the summary of his preaching is given in precisely the same terms as that of Jesus' preaching: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near" (3.2; 4.17) where the Baptist, it is claimed, "becomes a preacher of the Christian congregation." /8

Finally, in the fourth gospel, John's description is that of a "witness", one who sees for himself the Spirit descend on Jesus (unlike the synoptic accounts though Matthew leaves the matter open) and one who can speak of Jesus' death in unusual and cryptic terms as "the Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world" and who becomes such an effective witness of the Christian congregation that two of his own disciples, pointed by the Baptist to Jesus, follow him. Thus it would appear that within the gospel tradition, John tends more and more to be identified with the Christian tradition, and yet at the same time there is an awareness that claims for the Baptist by his own disciples that he is the Christ may make John more than a mere forerunner (John 1.20 implies this). It does appear that there is a more than normal concern in the fourth gospel to spell out the position of the Baptist in relation to Jesus and yet at the same time to christianize him. Such a paradoxical position belongs also to the OT saints for the church e.g. Abraham, David and Moses as types of Christ and yet not Christian.

If then the Baptist has a distinctive yet ambiguous role within the gospel tradition, how does he fit in to the total theme of the gospel as response to a life or death situation? I suppose we must be wary of finding what we want to find in this instance but bearing in mind that when Mark wrote John was dead and the manner of his death familiar and this had been handed down in oral tradition, the church must have pondered long and hard about John's exact position in relation to the Christian tradition and to the death of Christ. This would be especially the case if some of John's disciples formed part of the basis of the followers of Jesus. /9

First of all, the description of John is "forerunner" i.e. he is forerunner of one who is to be crucified. While the description is taken from the OT, it need not only derive from there. Is there not some sense in which the "forerunner" can imply some identification with the one who is to follow? It should be remembered that the position given to the Baptist is a Christian interpretation, not a Jewish one though no doubt



some Jews, especially those who have responded to John, could hardly fail to think of John in terms of the divine messenger of Malachi. /10 The summary of the baptist's message in Mark is very terse indeed. It may indicate a certain shaping in the preaching or teaching of the church. A natural question by members of the church would relate to the difference between John and Jesus and one line of reply would be that John baptized with water but Jesus is to baptize with the Holy Spirit. The baptist, by acknowledging Jesus as the Mightier One, would further confirm this. Of course it can be understood as a playing down of the role of the baptist by the church and we are faced again with the dilemma as to whether the baptist esteemed Jesus as highly as Christian tradition has it or is this merely a construction of a church on the defensive?

While Mark mentions such a prophecy, he does not. unlike Luke and the Fourth Gospel, mention the fulfilment ie the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This marks the climax of Jesus' work after crucifixion and resurrection - he bestows the Holy Spirit. (cf Acts 2.33; John 20.22). The thoughtful member of the congregation who listened to the reading of this passage in worship would assume the whole context of this promise. Indeed he would be experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit as he worships. Behind the presence of the Holy Spirit is the assurance that Jesus is alive, that God had not failed his promise. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee that God has not forsaken them in their broken, remorseful and disheartened state.

We turn to look again at the passage on fasting and the removal of the bridegroom in chapter two, vss 18-20. It forms one unit in an artificially constructed section on the theme of conflict ie between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. If we take our passage as a type of pronouncement story, then the emphasis is on the death of Jesus and the sorrow (fasting) that will follow. /11 It is placed in the context of fasting as practised by John's disciples and the Pharisees. It is possible that the early church tended to add details to a construct on conflict. In a grouping of units to explain why it was Jesus had to die, concentration on the party chiefly responsible would be natural. Difficulty, for example, is found in trying to account for the Pharisees in the

cornfields (2.23-28). Indeed "Pharisees" especially in Matthew become an umbrella term for such authorities. Evidence of unthinking adjustment to parallel John's disciples with the Pharisees is suggested by the quite unprecedented phrase "disciples of the Pharisees" on the pattern "the disciples of John". How far can we ascertain any conflict in the synoptic gospels between the baptist and his disciples? The uncertain subject of erchontai kai legousin (They come and say) which can be impersonal or can awkwardly refer to "the disciples of John and the Pharisees" does suggest some meddling with an original text. If the Pharisees are left out, we have a straight contrast between John's disciples and those of Jesus. The disciples of John fast in mourning for their leader. Later when the "bridegroom" is snatched away, ie the crucifixion takes place, the disciples will mourn. It is possible, then, that as the Roman authorities, represented in Nero, brought about the persecution of the church, so Pharisees as representative of the Jewish authorities and the real force behind the condemnation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin are introduced to create a conflict unit. /12

It is also notable that we have a most awkward combination in 3.6, a verse that concludes the section on conflict where we have the Pharisees and Herodians combining in a plot against Jesus. Is this so improbable a combination that it must be true or is it an impossible combination? Is the writer - perhaps pre-markan - trying to express awkwardly and improbably that a variety of hostile forces were opposed to Jesus and prepared to kill, just as Herod executed the Baptist? Herodians are not mentioned in this collection of conflict stories but the arrest of the baptist is mentioned in 1.14. Whatever may be the explanation, to a church living continually under the threat of execution like Jesus, among whose ranks many have died, this unit could be a source of strength and re-assurance.

In chapter six we have inserted immediately after the disciples are sent out on mission and before their return a section that is not always appreciated, the story of Herod, Herodias and John (14-29) /13 It is however interesting to note some parallels that are worth recording. While Jesus is rejected by his own people at Nazareth (6.1f) John is rejected by Herod (cf 6.14,26). Jesus who steadfastly

follows the will of God is crucified unjustly while John who insists on keeping the law on marital relationships is beheaded. Both are at the mercy of the powers that be, whether Pilate or the puppet king, Herod. Unlike Jesus, however, the death of John appears to owe little to Jewish opposition.

The martyr church at Rome could not help but recognize features of Jewish stories about martyrs. /14 An examination shows a consistent framework in such tales. We have the prophetic figure, here described as "a righteous and holy man" (cf 20b). The prophet keeps steadfastly to the law and is imprisoned by the ruler or king (cf v17) Such a ruler may be under the influence of someone else eg his wife as Ahab to Jezebel and Herod to Herodias. As a result he becomes the instrument of his wife's hostility in securing the death of the prophet (cf v19) by a variety of means (v27). The prophet, however can be vindicated of the respect shown by John's disciples to his corpse. /15 Thus the prophet or martyr can oppose the authorities, bearing witness to them as to what is right. They in turn react against the prophet and can bring about his death. Echoes of the story of Ahab and Jezebel are apparent in the account, the latter, denounced by Elijah (baptist) seeks to destroy him (1 Kings 19.1-8)

The whole section is wedged in, as has been pointed out, between the sending out of the twelve and their return to report (6.7-13, 30). Some explain the insertion as implying that the mission took a long time. /16 But is this the only explanation that suits? The mission of the twelve reflects the later mission of the church. At its very heart, its very centre, is persecution, even death. The baptist had proclaimed his message and the result is set down here. Mark gives us a salutary lesson. This is no soft task but a task fraught with risk. In the post-neronian period the examples are many and of the twelve one has defected while two have become witnesses unto death.

Mark, or the source he uses, prefaces the account of John's death with a short section on the rumours that 'Follow Jesus' mighty works (6.14-16) One report claimed Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead and the mighty works confirm this fact. This general report reminds us of the expectation in Jesus' time that a prophetic figure



at the end-time, is to be put to death and rise again. Is there then the implication that the baptist will rise from the dead? It is ironical that the one who put John to death can now claim that he has risen. But can this be isolated from the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the close relationship of John with him? Here then John who is dead is spoken of as alive - death and resurrection.

Thus yet again the martyr church can listen to accounts that speak not only of death but of life, not only of despair but hope, not only of loss but of gain.

### To euaggelion, The Gospel

But we have to remind ourselves that Mark, in all of this only speaks of the archē the "beginning" of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He never tells us that the story is ended. Such a "beginning" can be referred to the action of God. It was God who began it all,

and he is with the church in the continued story whether it be in Rome or Ephesus or Jerusalem. Mark can include traditions that speak of new wine and new cloth. Since it is a new beginning, it makes what has gone before old. It is too early yet to describe the Taanach as an Old Testament but God is now present in strength in the new era. When the writer of the first epistle of John says "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen for ourselves and our hands have touched, I mean the word of life", he is making quite explicit that things began with Jesus. The Fourth gospel goes back in terms that recall the creation story to speak of the Logos who was in the beginning and was divine. Mark does not rise to such sublime heights but, in a tragic and desolating situation, he affirms that God made the beginning in the gospel and it is that gospel the church proclaims.

The description Mark gives to what he writes is euaggelion, "Gospel". In the distinctive sense it has in Paul it is probably a new coinage. The parallels in the secular world of "good news", especially linked up with the birth of a son to the Emperor or a celebration of a birthday have little to do with Pauline usage. The nearest link is probably the Hebrew verb basar (בָּשַׂר in Piel or Hithpael) as used in second Isaiah:

You who bring good tidings to Zion, Go up on a high mountain  
You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice  
with a shout (40.9; cf also 60.6)

In Paul emphasis is laid on the act of proclamation. It is not too much to say that for Paul it was only gospel when preached. Much is made here of its application here to a piece of writing, that here for the first time we have a new literary form, a document of faith where the writer declares whose he is and whom he serves ie it is also a confession of faith. But of course it is a collectionary for the primitive church, a piece of evangelism, a catechism for the instruction of young converts. Yet, if the situation is such as we claim, it is a document to strengthen and comfort the church in a time of severe testing.

In the structure of the gospel of Mark we get the impression that it is running on rather breathlessly but once it reaches the story of the Passion, the pace slackens and there is time to stop and think and absorb. The sense of haste is partly created by the use of euthus "immediately" and at times when it appears to be redundant. It is notable, too, how many occurrences are concentrated into the first chapter and diminish in a rather striking way in the rest of the gospel. Is this Mark's way of calling attention to the Passion, that, while what he writes throughout he feels is important, the story of the Cross is pre-eminent? Mark is, in effect, doing in writing what Paul does in proclamation, "preaching the Cross". This is not to deny an inner dynamic in what Mark writes but the central, focal point is the crucifixion.

The phrase, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ" is unique within the gospels or rather within the two gospels that use euaggelion. In the four instances that occur in Matthew, three are found with the word "preach" (kērussō), and the additional phrase "of the kingdom" (cf 4.33 (Mk 1.14); 9.35; 24.14). In all cases in Matthew, the word "preach" is present ie it is the "gospel preached" (cf 26.13). Among the phrases unique in Mark besides 1.1 are "gospel of God" (1.14) which Matthew replaces with "kingdom"; the absolute use in 1.14, "believe in the gospel" (1.15); in two phrases where "gospel" and "Jesus" appear to be equated ie "for my sake and the gospel's" (8.35; 10.29) Luke almost invariably

prefers the verb euaggelizomai "preach the good news", a term which is located in, and binds together, the old and new dispensation and, as a verb, emphasizes the active or dynamic aspect. In Acts we find two uses of euaggelion but with other phrases ie ho logos tou euaggeliou ("the word (or "preaching") of the gospel" (15.7) and "bore testimony (diamarturasthai) to the gospel of the grace of God" (20.24)). Is it possible that Luke avoids the absolute use of euaggelion in case it may give rise to a misunderstanding about its dynamic character, thus he adds in logos to make this "the preaching of the gospel" while in the other of course we have the word "bore testimony" ie to the gospel of God's grace. Whatever may be the explanation, Luke does not use one single instance from Mark of euaggelion. Does he find it incongruous, a reading back of a term that only emerges later?

One view that is still held is that Mark is influenced by Paul on occasions when writing his gospel. This is not to claim any extensive influence of Paul but on occasions it remains plausible eg the potted kerygma in the passion saying (8.31;9.31;10.33), the idea of ransom (10.45) and of covenant (14.24). It is possible also to see the influence of Paul in the kerygmatic structure of the gospel itself especially the dominance of the Passion. Does Mark owe his use of euangelion to a deliberate recall of Paul? Or is the word traditional (Cf R. Pesch, Das Markus Evangelium, Vol 1, pp104f) ? The outline in the passion sayings includes suffering (8.31;9.12), rejection and death (8.31;9.31). It is notable that Mark waits until nearer the Trial to spell it out in considerable detail. Does he detail it in this way because in some way it parallels the experience of the Roman church?

### The gospel and Demonic spirits

It is not our purpose to consider in detail the gospel in relation to demonic spirits. That the words of Jesus had authority and power is given its context in the baptism of Jesus when the Holy Spirit descends on (or "into") him.

If the church wavered in its view of Jesus because of what it suffered, leading to doubts about him and the claims made for him, if there was a crisis of faith, the assertion of Jesus' pre-existence, the OT prophecy pointing to him, and the further



confirmation through the voice from heaven can be seen as deliberate reassurance. He is the beloved Son, the suffering servant, the one on whom God's attestation in Isaiah 42.1f asserts: "I have put my Spirit upon him."

This Jesus comes into contact with demonic forces in the desert as one who is endowed with the Holy Spirit. He is greater than the demonic forces that dwell there with the wild beasts and, in the battle against Azazel and his herds, Jesus' triumph is underlined when we read of the angels' constant ministrations. It reminds us of the saying of Jesus recorded in Q, "If I by the finger of God (= Lk; Mt has "Spirit of God". One would have expected Luke to use the latter) expel demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt 12.28), or of what Jesus said when the seventy came back from their mission and reported the subjection of the demons: "I saw Satan fall as lightning to the ground" (Luke 10.18).... "I have given you authority (power) to tread on serpents and scorpions", the latter presumably symbols of malignant spirits. Mark prefers the term dynamis, "work of power" for such exorcisms ie Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit engages with powerful unclean spirits (as Mark prefers to describe them) and is triumphant. Such unclean spirits with their supernatural insight identify for the persecuted church the person of Jesus as "Holy One of God" (1.24) or "Son of God" (3.11). To the church at Rome which saw mighty demonic forces at work destroying their community, such stories would come with comfort and reassurance.

With force of arms we nothing can, full soon were we downriden  
But for us fights the proper man whom God himself hath bidden.

Ask ye who is the same? Christ Jesus is his name

The Lord Sabaoth's Son; he, and no other one,

Shall conquer in the battle.

Whether we are to explain the overcoming of the demons in any ultimate sense as taking place in the wilderness when Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, overcomes them (Cf E. Best, The Temptation and the Passion (Cambridge 1965) pp190f et alia ) or whether we are to see this battle as continuing throughout Jesus' ministry and climaxed in the Cross (cf G.B. Caird, Principalities and Powers, (Oxford 1956) pp70f) whose meaning, according to Aulen, is that

victory has taken place over evil powers, it remains that such a demonstration of power over evil forces is bound up with the person of Jesus. He is the mightier one who binds up Satan.

In an Ulster situation, evil assumes such an intractable form, that often people think of something more than the sin of wicked men and women - the work of evil powers. It can be difficult to understand why evil gets away with it, as would appear, and why such tragedies as that of Mexico City, like the storm on the lake, could not provide more evidence of divine control. The lengthy story of the Gadarene demoniac need not be merely a dramatic story but a way of emphasizing that, however multiplied may be the demonic forces arrayed against the church, however devastating their effect upon the human personality, the power of expulsion and of transformation still lies in the authority of Jesus and that in spite of paganism at its most evil and terrifying.

The believing community at Rome we can surmise had its own considerable portion of defectors. It may have been expressed all sorts of ways, giving up membership of the community and so not being brought before the authorities; keeping their identity secret; clearing out altogether in an act of sheer panic and yet wanting back; under the strain of torture and its physical agony to reach breaking point and willy-nilly denying Christ; perhaps there were those within the community who betrayed others to the authorities for gain, a pagan son his Christian father or a pagan mother her converted daughter, utterly resentful of her leaving the pagan gods. The list of failures could be multiplied. The unit on the sin without forgiveness could meet such a situation: "All sins and transgressions will be forgiven" - what a sweeping statement! Then the salutary finish: "but the sin against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven" (Mk 3.28-30) Many of those who had failed had never lost their faith in Christ. If in a moment of agony and stress, they lost their true identity in an involuntary denial, they had never in their hearts lost touch with Christ. Perhaps there were those who thought that there was no acceptance for them. Their sin was too great, too heinous. It can apply to to the early church at Rome, at Jerusalem, at Ephesus,

or whatever. Thus Mark woos back the sad, dispirited and remorseful members of the church.

The reflections on our theme could be enlarged. We could show how Mark comforts the church whose proclamation of the gospel was again and again confronted with failure eg the seed growing secretly or the mustard-seed parables, the rejection at Nazareth, the purpose of the parables in stiffening opposition. It could be shown how slow the disciples were to confess Jesus as the Christ, how weak and wayward they were until the resurrection transformed them through the Holy Spirit and that beyond the limits of Mark's gospel. Who is theios anēr who can multiply bread for all the needs of the church, who can calm their fears in the worst of storms, who, when evil has done its worst, is raised from the dead but the one who is with the church in its hour of crisis but the Jesus Christ whom the church proclaims and who continues with them in the omnipresence of his risen power? Even when he hangs helpless on the Cross, the pagan centurion had to say: "Truly this was a(the) Son of God"?

#### Notes

1. The initial impetus to this theme was a sermon written for Townsend Presbyterian church in 1975 from which the thoughts on the theme multiplied.
2. Cf W. Marxsen, Introduction to the NT (ET), London 1968, 142;
3. For the evidence, cf D. Guthrie, NT Introduction, London 1965 ad loc.
4. For the textual problem, see E.M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek NT, UES London 1971, p73
5. Commented on by E. Schweizer in W. Telford (Ed), The Interpretation of Mark, SPCK, 1985 p44
5. Cf W Grundmann, Das Evangelium nach Markus, THK, Berlin 1968 ad loc.
7. H. Conzelmann in his The Theology of Luke (ET), London 1960 makes Johr. belong to the time of old dispensation, basing his view on one interpretation of Luke 16.16, a view which has aroused considerable criticism



Notes (Continued)

8. G. Bornkamm in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew(ET), London 1960, p15
9. The case is over-stated in W. Wink,, John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition Cambridge 1968 but is still is, to some extent, valid.
10. Cf Josephus, Antiquities (XVIII,5.2) for his references to John; also Charles H. Scobie, John the Baptist, London 1964, pp17-22.
11. Is there a possibility here that fasting has to do with sorrow for failing to rise to the challenge of the Baptist, for not being sufficiently identified with him?
12. There does seem to be a deliberate attempt in Matthew to make the Pharisees the real centre of conflict eg changing the descriptions of the authorities in Mark often to "Pharisees" (Cf Matt ch.23)
13. The gap between the arrest of the Baptist (1.14) and the account of his death is lengthy. Did Mark seek to give it a more central position, not too far from the passion to make the parallel clearer? Mark does some skilful structuring. Chapter three is an especially striking example.
14. Cf J. Gnllka, Die Verstockung Israels. Isaias 6.9-10 in der Theologie der Synoptiker, StArt 3, München 1961, pp 84-87; also R. Pesch, Das Markus-Evangelium, Vol 1 (Herder), Freiburg 1977 ad loc
15. Pesch, op.cit. 338f
16. So E. Schweizer, The Good News according to Mark, (ET), London 1970 p132

Martin McNamara

Intertestamental Literature

Old Testament Message, volume 23

Michael Glazier, Inc., Wilmington, Delaware, 1983  
pp 319

In 1970 I published a short article in Church Quarterly urging that more attention should be paid in standard works on the history and literature of Israel to the period between the testaments. Too many histories stopped (and still do) with Ezra-Nehemiah or the Maccabees; too many introductions to the Bible moved from Malachi to Mark (and still do) without noting the chasms that lie between. Fortunately, things have changed, thanks partly to the impetus of the discoveries at Qumran and partly, perhaps, to the dramatic increase of biblical students in the last two decades seeking new territories to explore. The resulting expansion of scholarly research into fields lying fallow since the days of R.H. Charles has led to new editions of texts to replace the long out of print and out of date SPCK Translations of early documents series (e.g., the recent volumes edited by J.P. Migne, J. Rendel Harris and H.F.D. Sparks) and new books designed for the student. E.g., the new Cambridge Commentaries on writings of the Jewish and Christian world 200 B.C. to A.D.200 or G.W.E. Nickelsburg's Jewish literature between the Bible and the Mishnah (SCM Press, 1981).

Martin McNamara's book belongs here. It is a near encyclopaedic attempt to make the present scholarly consensus on the known intertestamental material accessible to the ordinary student. This laudable aim is to meet the difficulty that English translations of many of these texts are not always easily available to the student. A serious omission from McNamara's book is precise reference to the editio princeps of each text and to an English translation, if available. The major aim must be to encourage students to read the texts for themselves; with the text in one hand and McNamara's book in the other, the student can make progress. The editorial promise of including illustrative passages (without explanatory comment) is helpful to some extent; but the references are indispensable and it is hard to explain their absence.

McNamara covers an enormous amount of ground. The text is solid with detail and replete with biblical and other textual references (though a detailed reference to scholarly literature is absent), and this makes for slow digestion, not fast reading. Among the chapters with such standard findings as 'Apocalyptic Literature', 'Testament Literature', 'The Literature of the Qumran Community', 'The Literature of Hellenistic Judaism', I was pleased to see a chapter on 'Prayer and prayers of the Intertestamental period', and I commend a study of this to anyone concerned with the Jewish theology of that age: lex orandi, lex credendi. The opening chapter contains a very useful study of how post-exilic Jewish writers understood and used Scripture. The sketch of the people of the Scrolls (p.109ff.) makes one realise how much we still rely on informed guesswork for our understanding of Qumran. But I find the opening note on the terms 'Apocrypha', 'Pseudepigrapha', 'Deuterocanonical' (p.17f) extremely confusing - was it a hurried afterthought? - and the final chapter 'Conclusions' somewhat one-sided and limited in scope. It conveys the impression that the main topic of concern in this period was the next world, which is hardly correct; space could have been given to other major concerns of intertestamental Jewish theology, e.g., the nature of God, man, ethics, the place of Israel in the world and Israel's attitude towards the Gentiles, etc. Similarly, the section on Josephus (pp.238ff.) limits itself to a presentation of Josephus the Jew

and gives no consideration to the importance and influence upon him of his respect for and even pride in the might and order of the Roman empire.

In spite of these reservations, I am grateful to Martin McNamara for this listenMassig students vade-mecum to the intertestamental literature, and I can only admire the industry that went into it, and congratulate him on his orderly and fair-minded presentation of abstruse and complex material.

Trinity College, Dublin.

J.R. Bartlett.

Shirley Lees (ed.), The Role of Women, (When Christians Disagree), 1984, pp.224, IVP, Leicester.

Phyllis Tribble, Texts of Terror, (Overtures to Biblical Theology), 1984, pp. xiv & 128, Fortress, Philadelphia.

"It is inadmissible", says one of eight contributors to the Inter-Varsity debate on "The Role of Women," to formulate doctrine on the basis of development in society, supported by Bible verses wrested from their context" (p.151). If it is conventional to measure irony by weight, this pronouncement fairly creaks under its unconscious burden. Under the attack is the belief that the Christian gospel has helped to create "modern woman", since the Bible itself affirms that women share with men an identical humanity, which outweighs their biological distinctiveness, requires full expression in every sphere of life, and makes of marriage a relationship of mutual self-giving and shared decision-making. But on the evidence here a scriptural defence of the "traditional" submissive, domestic wife may itself absolutise extra-biblical cultural variants, and decontextualise biblical statements.

What image is more culturally-conditioned than that of the bourgeois homemaker - whose liberation from hard physical labour for the quiet role of supportive wife and child-rearer is a recent western phenomenon, originally dependent (irony again!), on the labours of other women, from the servant class? And if it is historically inadmissible to superimpose this idealised female role upon Scripture, it is hermeneutically inept to discount Christ himself, his person and his gospel, as the context within which discrete biblical references to women's nature and role are to be interpreted. Yet it is denied here (e.g.p.116), that the crucified Christ can embody an iconoclastic renovation of the alleged "creational model" of male hierarchy and it is assumed (e.g.p.137), that the revolutionary attitude of Jesus to women lacks normative significance for the churches now, since it does not disrupt the "uniform biblical pattern", from Adam to Aaronic priesthood to the Pauline communities, which excludes women from formal leadership.

Mercifully, there are sensitive and astute contributions, notably from Joyce Baldwin, Valerie and Michael Griffiths, and Howard Marshall, which recognise the diversity of biblical attitudes to women, the relevance of apostolic injunctions, and the need for a Christological hermeneutic over them. They show, for example, how both on internal grounds, and in relation to Gen.1, it is possible to interpret Gen.2 as affirming identity and mutuality rather than priority and derivation between men and women. They argue the



either the Gen.3 description of the disharmonies intruded upon our relationships by sin, nor the Pauline prescriptions for female behaviour (e.g. 1 Cor.11 & 14; 1 Tim.2), in specific and manifestly still fallen circumstances, can be isolated from the Kerygma that Christ has abolished all antagonism and division between male and female (Gal.3,28). Above all, they are ready to interpret the analogy of "headship" for husband-wife relations (e.g. 1 Cor.11 & Eph.5), in terms of one whose authority and lordship were constituted in cruciform servitude and self-abandonment.

It remains, however, an unsystematic discussion, of erratic quality, and of less value than Paul Jewett's study of the same texts, and from a similar theological perspective, in Man as Male and Female (Eerdmans, 1975).

And precisely because the debaters announce their commitment to the authority of Scripture, they suffer even more from juxtaposition with Willis Tribble's Texts of Terror. One contributor to The Role of Women reads, "let the Book that speaks for itself, speak." Quite so; but dare we listen when the Bible speaks, unbearably, 'not of the cosy, sanitised world of loving, family relations, but of the callous, violent world in which human beings, and especially women, are abused and brutalised? Few books from within the Christian camp could be more embarrassing than Texts of Terror for those who identify the biblical records as the Word of God.

In this bleak, sorrowing companion to God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Portress, 1978), Tribble directs her "literary-feminist" methodology away from the joyous celebration of womanhood in the Hebrew Scriptures towards picking, misogynist OT texts, which tell of women victimised and violated: Sarah the slave, used and cast off (Gen.16 & 21); Tamar ravished and violated (2 Sam.13); an unnamed concubine gang-raped and dismembered (Judges 19); the virgin daughter of Jephthah made a human sacrifice (Judges 11).

All of these stories - be they historical or allegorical - are told with approval of the crime, or leave the guilty unpunished [though the tale of revenge can bring more violence, and the abuse of many more women than the original outrage (e.g. Judges 20 & 21).] Clearly men are no more the sole perpetrators of inhumanity, or women its only victims, in the story of Israel, than that of the world. And it is tempting to say that the Bible herself fails to set these tales in context - particularly that of another story of inhumanity and violence which ended on a cross. She refuses to anaesthetise her own pain, or allow us to resuppress the memory of these forgotten women, with anodyne simplicities about redemptive suffering, or even redemption from suffering. The most she will do is wrestle, Jacob-like, with demons in the night, walking away possibly with a blessing, certainly with a limp (pp.4f). But does that itself not show a courageous faith, shaped by the cross of Christ? God's own refusal to overcome the violent oppressors of this world except by surrender to their brutality, without serve, compels "biblical" Christians to face foul atrocities in his world, in his Word, without flinching, hearing the cry of the victim less with sympathy than shame, and answering her questions not with doctrine but with penitence.

John C. Gaskin, Ph.D.      The Quest for Eternity.  
1984, pp.190, Penguin.

As "An Outline to the Philosophy of Religion" this is a useful book. It introduces the problems, some of them, in an interesting manner. It shows how finely balanced is the evidence, so much as is reviewed, for or against the existence of God. Although Dr. Gaskin reveals the weaknesses in the traditional arguments for the existence of God (ch.3) he claims that they contain some truth (p.77). From a review of numinous experiences he concludes that "no direct experience of God can be decisively identified as an external experience," (p.102) i.e., experience of an object outside oneself. In chapters 5 and 6 much more weight is allowed to the arguments against the existence of God. Nevertheless there occur in these chapters positive statements for belief in God. At the end of ch.5 (External Scepticism) Dr. Gaskin concludes that no case can be established that "the central factual statements of theism are meaningless." (p.117). Again at the end of ch.6 which examines questions of evil, free and responsibility, Dr. Gaskin points out that these are "problems which arise within theistic belief" (p.147). In ch.7 which explores "The Limitations of Atheism", Dr. Gaskin finds that it has "practical, moral and spiritual disadvantages" (p.165) although it is admitted that the evidence is "arguable," and draws attention to its "metaphysically and existentially stultifying effects" (p.170).

The final chapter (8) contains a synopsis of the path trodden in the book. The last sentence is: ".....my mind inclines to the not altogether disagreeable Epicurean acceptance that the world is as it is and is all there is but the hope of other worlds somehow lingers." But in the light of the limitations of atheism how can the author allow his mind to accept the atomism of Epicurus? Further, in the light of the fine balance of the arguments for and against the existence of God, how can he come to a conclusion at all? Because of the immensity and importance of the problem (acknowledged on the first page) it seems improper to come to a conclusion and especially so after only 170 pages of argument. During his account of the arguments against belief in God (ch.5), because of "the nice balance of the evidence" Dr. Gaskin writes "The conclusion should not be: no one can decisively prove that God exists (or does not exist); therefore forge the subject. It should be: knowledge is not permissible if there really is a God: therefore each person must think the thing out for himself and reach his own decision. All that one man can do for another is to draw the evidence, and some thoughts about it, carefully to his attention." (p.117) The conclusion stated 62 pages later seems at variance with this wise advice. However, dissatisfaction with Epicurean atomism seems to be implied in the very last words "the hope of other worlds somehow lingers Ad finem nondum adeptum." Perhaps this dissatisfaction, if such it be, and this recognition of an end not yet reached point to the main lesson of this book - the quest continues. Each must think the matter out for himself or herself. Hope itself may become an avenue to knowledge.

At various specific points the book was unsatisfying to this reviewer. For example, when considering the problem of evil versus the omnipotence

a morally good God, Dr. Gaskin refers to the common cold as "a mild debilitating misery which neither refines character nor is the product of human freedom." (p.127). Thus it serves no purpose towards character building nor is it the result or waste-product of this process. Also the balance of nature would not have been upset if God had created a world without it. I beg to differ; it is surely permissible to see in the common cold a reminder of the frailty of life leading to a refinement of character. Also it could be the amber light telling the sufferer to be careful of his/her health; otherwise the red light will soon shine indicating a worse illness. Further, the common cold may be a by-product of human freedom, e.g. wrong diet, bad housing, lack of exercise. Finally it is not certain that the balance of nature would not be upset if the cause of the common cold were eliminated, so long as that cause remains unknown.

It is regrettable that the book contains no reference to modern physics which in the past fifty years has "seemed to turn commonsense on its head and find closer accord with mysticism than materialism." (Paul Davies God and the New Physics, p.vii.) For Dr. Gaskin one of the problems with belief in God is the "suspicion that the notion of a dispersed, disembodied agent or person is incoherent." (p.117). For the Professor of Theoretical Physics, Paul Davies, this is not a difficulty! "The old cundrum of how mind acts on the body is seen to be just a muddle of conceptual levels." (p.86)

This book has many good points. A summary is provided at the end of each chapter. The glossary of terms is useful. The book is within the grasp of anyone willing to engage in moderately serious study for the sake of his/her belief. Nine pages of references, plus footnotes, show the breadth and depth of reading on which the work is based. Shafts of humour encourage the beginner to continue the quest. However sarcasm as on p.148 seems out of place in this most serious of subjects. Congratulations to Dr. Gaskin's Father for his proof-reading, and to the publishers and printers; in this respect the book is faultless!

Quehill College, Belfast.

J.T. MacCormack.



Bruce Chilton (Ed.), The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus

SPCK 1984 pp xi, 162 pb np

William Telford (Ed.), The Interpretation of Mark

SPCK 1985 pp xi, 180 pb np

Scholars, ministers and biblical students alike will welcome this new series of the SPCK, entitled Issues in Religion and Theology, of which we have here two examples, both in the biblical field (though the series does not limit itself to biblical studies), and both making use of previously published essays that have proved significant for the continuing discussion.

The Kingdom of God

Dr Chilton, in his introductory essay, gives a valuable critical survey of the history of interpretation of the kingdom of God which includes the treatments of Ritschl, Harnack, A. Schweitzer, Otto (an extract of his work, "The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man" (1938) forms the substance of one of the chosen essays), Dodd, Jeremias, and Glasson. Chilton has his own distinctive approach, based on an analysis of eleven passages from the synoptic gospels, where he acknowledges his debt to the Targums whose statements, he claims, represent exactly Jesus' normal usage and, in particular, those of the Targum of Isaiah. Thus Dr Chilton tends to reject an apocalyptic understanding of the kingdom and any enquiry as to whether it is present or future. He expresses his position: "The kingdom was not a regime, whether present or future, at all, neither the moral association of Ritschl nor the apocalyptic utopia of Schweitzer. Rather, Jesus was impelled to preach by the certainty that God would reveal himself powerfully; the kingdom announcement affirmed vividly but simply that God was acting and would act in strength on behalf of his people." (p23; cf the title of Chilton's published thesis: God in Strength SUNT 1: Linz)

Chilton joins others in criticizing Otto's resort to Iranian religion for an explanation of Jesus' teaching apart from the fact that the dating of such sources is too late for an understanding of pre-Christian religion (p8); he identifies himself largely with the viewpoint

of Dr T.F. Glasson in his essay, "Schweitzer's Influence - Blessing or Bane?" (pp107-119) where Glasson denies the validity of A. Schweitzer's use of sources, his so-called "late Jewish view" of the kingdom, imposed on the synoptic gospels rather than drawn from them (espec. 108ff); Dodd's "realized Eschatology" does not take adequately into account the world in which Jesus lived (11; on the rather worn discussion on ἐγγίζω as "draw near" or "arrive" cf p14) (For other criticisms see Dr Chilton's opening essay pp 1-26)

Other essays include Werner G. Kummel's "Eschatological Expectation in the Proclamation of Jesus" (36-45), arguing for the view that Jesus mistakenly expected the near return of the kingdom (Cf Matt 10.23) and for the "concrete temporal sense of Jesus' eschatological expectation" (p45); Erich Grässer's "On Understanding the Kingdom of God" (52-71), translated by C. March from the original German; Michael Lattke's "On the Jewish Background of the Synoptic Concept 'The Kingdom of God'" (72-91), translated by M. Rutter; Norman Perrin's "Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom", consisting of extracts from his book of the same title (92-106); finally, we have a translation again by M. Rutter, of Hans Bald's "Eschatological or Theocentric Ethics? Notes on the Relationship between Eschatology and Ethics in the Preaching of Jesus" (133-152) where we have a useful evaluation of the views of Bultmann, Conzelmann, H. Schurmann, A. Vögtle, L. Goppelt and H. Merklein, and Bald's answer to his own question: "Jesus' theology is eschatological, because he preaches the coming of God 'now'; but his eschatology is theocentric because it is based on a conception of God which includes eschatology. Jesus' ethics are eschatological and non-eschatological at the same time." (p152).

### The Interpretation of Mark

Dr William Telford gives a comprehensive look at the research on Mark's Gospel from early on in this century, confirming that, rather being "a simple, objective report of things as they had come to him in the tradition", (p1) it is complex and subject to various interpretations of a most apposite kind and still rousing considerable interest

among scholars. The minister or layman could very well be bewildered by the wide diversity of opinion and, while the tendency is to accept in good faith what scholars say, there may be a hankering suspicion that elements in it are quite unnecessary and even misleading in relation to the interpretation of Mark as the book of the Church. (cf Dr Telford's remarks on p.8)

The collected essays deal with the structure of the Gospel (E. Schweizer's brilliant paper on "Mark's Theological Achievement" (pp 42-58) or redaction (cf Dr Best's perceptive and cogent argument in his essay on "Mark's Preservation of the Tradition" (pp 119-133)) or the disciples (cf Theodore J. Weeden's "The Heresy which Necessitated Mark's Gospel" pp64-77) with its interesting but unconvincing claim that Mark's gospel is intended as a "polemical device created by the evangelist to disgrace and debunk the disciples" (p66) and their role (Robert C. Tannehill's "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role" (pp 134-157), representing, along with Joanna Dewey ("The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2.1-3.6"; pp 109-118), the recent trend in literary criticism in American Scholarship). The final essay explores "Mark's Theological Significance for the Theology of Early Christianity" (S. Schulz) where it is claimed that Mark is the most influential book in the whole NT, that it is deeply anti-apocalyptic and anti-Torah and has been influenced by the Hellenistic tradition of thought with its history and epiphanies (pp 158-166). Other essays are Karl Kertelge, "The Epiphany of Jesus in the Gospel (Mark)" (pp 78-94) and Norman Perrin, "The Christology of Mark: a Study in Methodology" (95-108)

This collection of significant essays on the Kingdom of God or on the Interpretation of Mark will greatly facilitate study and research in these areas. They will form an indispensable part of any theological library. One of the striking features of the series is the quality of translation from the German originals.

Union Theological College  
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E.A. Russell



IBS 7, October 1985

### Contributors

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